# The Love of Parson Lord

## and Other Stories

Mary E. Wilkins

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# The Love of Parson Lord

## *AND OTHER STORIES*

BY

MARY E. WILKINS (Mrs. Freeman)

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# The Love of Parson Lord

# The Love of Parson Lord

ON Monday morning Love Lord sat on the side-door step, stitching some fine linen shirt-bands for her father. It was a day in early May, moving from dawn to dark with a rush of strong fresh winds, made almost as palpable as wings by the apple and cherry blossoms which they loosened and bore away from the trees. There was a fine apple-orchard in full bloom in the rear of Parson Reuben Lord's gray-shingled house, three large white-plumed cherry-trees stood in the side yard, but Love would never taste the apples and cherries therefrom, unless perchance some scanty measure of poor fruit could not be readily sold. All of Parson Lord's alabaster boxes of life were sold, and the proceeds devoted to foreign missions. Love had never questioned the wisdom of it; she

had never questioned the wisdom of any of the orderings of her life. She regarded them as indirectly ordained by Providence through her father, and not to be cavilled at, except possibly in one instance. Love at twelve years of age had had many lacks of life, but only one active sorrow, and that sense of loss and deprivation after the delight of possession which induces rebellion.

Love had lost her mother when she was scarce more than a baby; she had been brought up by a rigorous widow, a distant relative of her father's, who had trained her according to all letters of law and faith. So inexorable had been her method, so thoroughly had Love been taught to perform her duties, that there had seemed to be danger of their losing the distinction of hand and individual work. Little Love had lived as under the self-regulating motive power of an automaton, her native inclinations, whether towards grace or perversity, being wholly amenable to her instructress, as to a spiritual sun and wind. Cousin Daphne Weatherhead, as the widow was called, was the only person with whom she was brought in close contact through

her childhood. Of her father she saw very little except at meals, at family prayers, and on Sabbath days, when she sat for hours, with her solemn innocent eyes intent upon him, as he proclaimed the truths of the Word and the terrors of the law from his beetling pulpit.

Parson Reuben Lord was so closely welded to his faith and his devotion that he seemed to gain therefrom a strange stiffness, almost ossification, of spirit. People, while holding him in utmost respect for his stern consistency of life, yet regarded him with awe which had in it something of terror. His fervent zeal for the cause of missions seemed the ruling passion of his life. His two brothers were still laboring in foreign fields. It had been the sorest trial of his life that delicate health in his youth had kept him at home in narrower and more peaceful tillage. It had also been a sore trial to him that his first-born child had not been a son, whom he could devote, with more certainty of the acceptability of the sacrifice, to the cause of Christ in heathen lands. There was, however, a belief in the village that he had so devoted

his first-born daughter, Elizabeth. When the child died, at the early age of seven, after a most wonderful life and precocious maturity of religious experience, afterwards celebrated in a memoir which became a village classic, people were strengthened in this belief. It was also reported, on the authority of Aunt Betsey Ware, who had officiated at both births, that the parson made a similar dedication to the Lord of his second daughter, Love, in spite of the expostulations of his poor wife Mehitable, whose maternal affection overcame her religious ardor.

It was even said that Mehitable Lord had faded away and died because of her preying grief over the loss of her first-born, and the fear lest the second, who was delicate, and had that sensitiveness of disposition which is sometimes thought prophetic of early death, should follow her. However that may have been, Mehitable Lord died when Love was too young to have anything but that vague sense of loss of love in the abstract which, while it changes the whole savor of life, does not rend it with bitterness.

Love had no little mates during her childhood. Cousin Daphne Weatherhead, seemingly with the best of motives, kept her aloof from them. "You are the minister's daughter, and should endeavor to follow in the foot-steps of your sainted sister," Cousin Daphne would remark if the little maid seemed to cast a wistful eye towards the frolics of the young of her kind. Poor little Love used, for she learned to read at an early age, to strive to console and amuse herself with the perusal of the memoir of her sainted sister. Sitting in her little chair, with the book on her small aproned knees, she bent her childish brows over its pious pages, and pondered gravely its every word.

Love's childhood, which might well have been considered somewhat dull and joyless, though so straightly ordered in the paths of righteousness and peace, held, however, but one grief. When she was six years old she had had a doll presented to her by a loving old dame who had brought up a family of fourteen children. The doll had belonged to her youngest daughter, and was a homely, rustic specimen of her race;

but Love took it to her heart with a great content and the most credulous admiration. She was guilty of the one act of deception and the one lie of her childhood for the protection of this poor doll which had come to her for motherhood. She hid the fact of its possession from Cousin Daphne, and then she told a falsehood when questioned.

The pleased old grandmother who had given it to her told of it here and there with innocent garrulity, not dreaming it would do harm. But when Cousin Daphne heard the news, home she came, and poor little Love underwent a miniature inquisition, and remained firm under her rack and thumb-screw. "No, Grandma Streeter didn't ever give me any doll," declared she, with blue eyes looking straight into Cousin Daphne's, yet with a recoil glance of horror at her own wickedness. The word of this small sister of a departed saint was pitted against that of an ancient mother in Israel, but Cousin Daphne made diligent search, and discovered the doll hidden away under Love's feather-bed. When she held it before Love, and the child saw the beloved symbolic baby, never of any beauty what-

ever, and now battered and marred by the caresses and corrections of many mothers, until only a little girl in whom the first strength of maternal imagination can encompass miracles could hold her of any account whatever, she expressed no shame or contrition; she only stretched out her arms with a cry of love and agony: "Give her to me! oh, give her to me! Don't take her away, Cousin Daphne!"

That confirmed matters. Love knelt in prayer with her father and Cousin Daphne, until, out of docility and terror, her soul was melted within her with contrition for her heinous sin. Poor little Love seemed to almost see the lapping of the infernal fires around her, and she could not even hold the doll in her arms for comfort. She did not see the doll again for years. She used often to wonder where it was, what Cousin Daphne had done with it; but she would no more have asked her than she would have taken the name of the Lord in vain. And as for asking her father, she would never forget till her dying day his countenance of stern wretchedness and condemnation when Cousin Daphne had

told him of her wickedness, and the almost despairing fervor of his prayer. She would as soon have asked for a little graven image.

Love was twelve years old when Cousin Daphne was found one afternoon sitting stiffly in her chair, with her knitting-work in her motionless hands. She did not come to prayers, and when Love went to call her, Cousin Daphne's face looked at her unseeingly out of the gathering dusk. After Cousin Daphne's death she lived alone with her father, it being held that with her fine training she was able to keep his house at the age of twelve. Love knelt with her father an hour every morning and evening, and listened to his reading of the Scriptures and prayers. She prepared his frugal meals, and sat timidly and respectfully opposite him at table. The rest of the time he remained alone in his study, walled in, as it were, with the thoughts of dead divines and fathers of the Church in mummy-cases of old calf-skin, and was in sore labor over his many-headed sermons.

Love kept his house, as she had been taught, as if it were her own soul; she

cleaned it as she would have cleaned her heart of sin; she made all the poor furnishings shine as if they had been the trappings of the Temple, and acquitted herself like a housewife of twice her age, to the approbation of all the village matrons. This morning, although it was still early, the house was neatly set in order from garret to cellar, and there were two hours for the fine stitching before dinner. She sat there, hearing the soft rush of the spring wind and breathing in the flurrying sweetness of the cherry blossoms, but with no consciousness thereof. She set the beautiful stitches, like a little row of pearls, with the precision of a machine, her fingers working with no aid from her mind, which was intent upon a dream she had the night before about her lost doll.

As Love sat there the dream was to her what the perfume was to the cherry blossom, and would have been as evident to a sense made for its perception. Love had dreamed, the night before, that she was up in the garret of her father's house, when she heard a little wail, like that of a young baby. She started and looked around, and

it came again, seemingly from the vicinity of an old hair trunk which her father had carried to college in his youth. An experience which she had had at church that day had possibly, by some obscure system of suggestion, induced the dream. That Sunday Love had seen for the first time the squire's new wife. The squire had lately married for the second time, a woman from the city, elderly, but very beautiful and stately. She had brought her orphan grandson to live with her. This grandson, Richard Pierce, was a boy of fourteen, large for his age and forward of understanding. He was nearly fitted to enter Harvard College. That Sunday, young Richard, sitting in the squire's pew, looked across at Love, sitting all alone in the parson's pew. Love was slim and tall, but with a pretty roundness under her little drab spencer cape, with apple curves of pink cheeks under her scooping bonnet, tied under her sweet chin with a sober-colored ribbon like her cape. Not a bright tint was there about Love, except in her face and hair. Young Master Richard looked at her with the half-indifferent, half-earnest gaze of an

intellectual boy whose mind is devoted to matters in his estimation more important than the faces of girls, and yet has at times, in his own despite, his heart stirred faintly with the instincts and imaginations of his kind. At last Love, compelled perhaps by his gaze, looked at him, though it was in the midst of a fiery appeal from the pulpit. She gazed at the boy with an utter calmness and unconsciousness of scrutiny, as if he were something inanimate. Indeed, to this young Love, with her perfect innocence of ignorance and the long training of her mind on spiritual lines, a boy did not mean as much as a girl, nor much more than a rose-bush or an apple-tree. Richard, as if something in himself, of which he had not known, was discovered by her gaze, looked away with a great blush, and then Love turned her eyes from him towards his grandmother. They were suddenly alert, full of the most timid yet ardent admiration. The one love with which the child had any acquaintance, and for which she had as yet any yearning, was in the face of that elderly dame. It shone plain to her sight when she glanced at the grandson by her

side, and it beamed forth, like a light in the windows of a home, when she saw little Love gazing at her in such timidly beseeching and admiring wise. Love cast down her eyes before the sweet mother-look of the squire's lady, her heart leaped, her mouth quivered as if she would weep. She thought that never, never since her own mother, whose caresses she remembered better than her face, had there been any one as beautiful as this woman. That morning Love heard no more of her father's discourse. She was conscious of nothing except that mother-presence, which seemed to pervade the whole church. The inexorable fatherhood of God, as set forth in the parson's sermon, was not as evident to the hungry little heart in His sanctuary as the motherhood of the squire's lady. She continued to gaze at her at intervals, with softly furtive eyes of adoration, as if the lady were the Blessed Mary, and she a little papist; and when she sometimes received a tenderly benignant glance in return, she scarcely knew where her body was, such was the elation of her spirit. When, after meeting, she was going down

the aisle, and came abreast of the wonderful lady, and the soft sweep of her velvet cloak brushed her face like a wing, she could not help an involuntary nestle against her side, as if she were a baby. Then the squire's lady bent down, her beautiful old face framed in gray curls, and smiled, and lifted her hand, and patted Love gently on the smooth curve of her cheek. Love could have gone down at her feet. Nobody since her mother's death had ever caressed her to that extent. She gave a quick look up at the lady with something between a sob and a smile, then shrank back, followed her out of church, and watched her drive away with the squire and Master Richard, though she did not see them at all.

Somehow this encounter with the squire's lady set Love to thinking, more strenuously than usual, of the lost doll of her childhood, and that night she dreamed that she went over to the old trunk, and suddenly her doll peeped at her from behind it. It wore the same muslin frock sprigged with green which she remembered well, and the same bonnet made of pasteboard covered with green satin; but the little face, which

looked up at her with the lips parted in a wail, was, curiously enough, that of the squire's lady, gray curls and all, with the tiny cheeks crumpled delicately in pink and white, like an old rose-bud. When Love awoke, she could scarcely believe that the dream was not true, being one of those for whom dreams are separated from the real by insensible shadings rather than sharp divisions.

Love pondered over it all the morning, and that afternoon, her father being away, she stole guiltily up to the garret, and stood listening, breathless, in the midst of the great stretch of space, with the rafters converging over her head. There was only one small window, and the afternoon was growing old. On either side of the garret, under the eaves, lay long shadows of dark mystery, which to the child's excited fancy seemed often stirring to arise. The garret, like the rest of the house, was very clean and sparse. All the small store of discarded household furnishings was stowed away neatly against the eaves, and the middle space was bare. Love could see the great arc of an old tow-wheel which had

"LOVE STOOD LISTENING"

not been used for many a year, and near it a cedar chest which contained her mother's meagre wardrobe, two barrels full of old sermons, and the little hair trunk. There was not much besides, except a surtout which had belonged to her grandfather, which hung on a nail over the trunk.

Love stood listening, she scarcely knew for what, but the influence of her dream was strong upon her. She was like a little statue of fearful attention, in her straight blue gown, her hands clutching nervously at her sides, her eyes dilating to the dusk and her own fears. Finally Love went over to the trunk and peered behind it. There was no doll there, at once to her disappointment and her relief. She opened the trunk, and it was full of old letters. Love straightened herself, and in so doing jostled her grandfather's surtout. One sleeve swung out and hit her cheek with a curious impetus for anything so presumably soft and light. Love started back; a sense of the uncanny thrilled her; then she caught hold of the sleeve eagerly, and there was her doll. Cousin Daphne had

been a subtle concealer; people had seldom found out anything which she wished to keep secret. She had doubtless many curious hiding-places in empty habits and meaningless forms for the privacies of her own character, and she was at no loss, working from within out to practical illustrations, to find a concealment for poor Love's doll.

Love slipped up the sleeve, and looked irresolutely at the clumsy rag feet; she looked at the pantalets edged with knitted lace, and the hem of the green-sprigged muslin skirt. Love removed the doll and looked at it tremblingly. It was the same old doll. Love went over to the front window and sat down on the floor, clasping it closely. She felt unutterably guilty, still there was a sweet comfort from the feeling of the doll in her arms which she could not help realizing, in spite of her conviction of sin. There was in her consciousness a savor, faint and diluted, of the joy of a mother united to a long-lost child. She gazed at its poor old rag face, its wide mouth painted grotesquely with pokeberry juice, its staring eyes outlined in circles

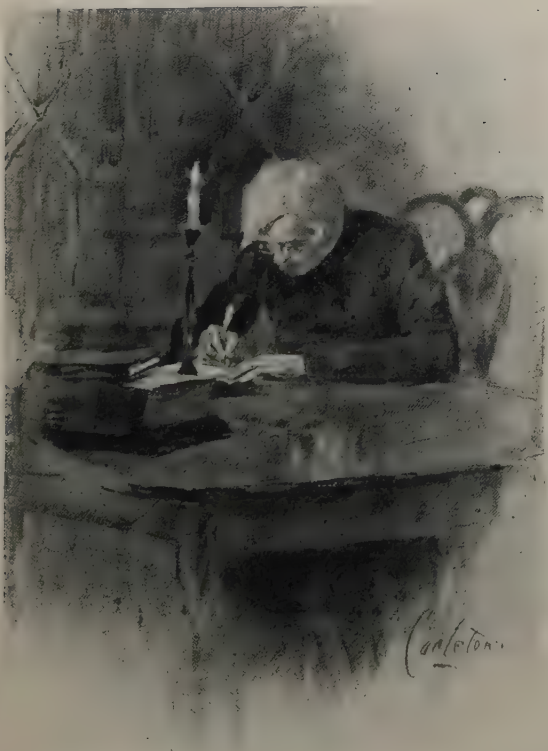
of India ink. She stroked lovingly the scanty locks made from a ravelled brown silk stocking. She knew that the doll was miserably ugly, but, by a sort of underknowledge of love, she also knew she was fair. She pressed her closely to her childish bosom, throbbing with a sense of shame and guilt, and yet with defiant joy. She kissed her as she had never kissed any living thing.

That night Parson Lord's supper was an hour late. He, working by candle-light in his study, felt that vague uneasiness which results from the interruption of a habit upon which no especial stress of mind has been laid, although it may have continued through a lifetime. Through his surfeit of spiritual food, he had scarcely ever been conscious of any desire for that of the flesh. He had never looked forward impatiently to his supper hour, and it was doubtful if he had ever partaken of the meal with a full perception of its quality or quantity, being always more or less abstracted from all material things. To-night he fidgeted over his sixthly without knowing why. He did not even know,

when his daughter came trembling to his study door, that the meal was late, but followed her without a word, and took his place at the table, and bowed his head for the solemnly muttered blessing. The meal was frugal, as all meals were at Parson Lord's — just a brown loaf, a pitcher of milk, and tea made of steeped sage leaves. Genuine tea was not to be thought of, with foreign missions in such sore need.

That night Parson Lord ate his supper with a curious mechanical gusto, as if his body, through its long fast, might be asserting itself without the knowledge or connivance of his mind. He did not notice that his daughter ate nothing, nor her disturbed face. After he had done he bowed his head reverently again, gave thanks to the Lord for His mercies in a lengthy list, and returned to his study.

An hour afterwards, when Love had washed and put away the supper dishes and set the bread to rising, she knocked at the study door, twice and thrice before her father heard her. At last he bade her enter, and looked up absently when the door opened, expecting to see some brother



"HE FELT A VAGUE UNEASINESS"

or sister in quest of spiritual aid, as was often the case. Instead, there stood his own daughter, pale and trembling piteously, holding the old doll in her arms. Parson Lord stared at her, took off his spectacles, wiped them, and stared again. "What do you want, my child?" he inquired.

Before he had finished speaking, Love came to his side and stood there in an agony of contrition, displaying the doll. "I found her where Cousin Daphne hid her," she said, in a strained, quick way; then she sobbed; all her staidness and propriety of demeanor had failed her.

The parson stared at her, his thin lips parted, his high forehead knitted. He had entirely forgotten the episode of the doll. Poor Love had to repeat the whole story. A light of understanding came into the parson's eyes as he listened. "And you found it, you say, this afternoon?" he said, in a curious voice.

"Yes, father," replied Love. Then she cried, with a great sob of appeal, "Oh, father, may I keep her now?"

Parson Lord's face quivered a little as

he looked at her, then settled again into its usual lines of ascetic sternness and gravity. None but his Maker knew if it cost him a struggle, but he refused the child; he bade her carry the doll back where she had found it. Love obeyed without a demur. She took a candle, went slowly up the steep garret stairs, stole tremblingly through the dark flickering stretch of shadows to the old surtout hanging with an awful semblance of life from the nail in the rafters, gave the poor doll one last fervent caress, and thrust it back in the sleeve, pinning it therein as before. That night Reuben Lord knelt long with his daughter in earnest prayer; her old sins of disobedience and deception were rekindled to their full enormity, until they shone before her as in characters of fire. That night Love slept little, being kept awake by the war between her innocent members and her fierce New England conscience. Many a time, as she lay there, it seemed to her that she must arise, steal up-stairs, rescue the doll from the darkness and loneliness, and hold it through the rest of the night close in her arms.

The next day was the Sabbath, and Love, sitting alone in the parson's pew, was much paler and soberer of countenance than usual. Once in a while, though she strove to keep her mind upon the sermon, her mouth quivered when she thought of the doll. Perhaps it was that which led the squire's lady to favor her with such special and gracious notice at the close of the services. That beautiful and stately lady, when she reached Love lingering at the door of the pew, actually put caressingly about her an arm draped with silk shimmering with purples like the breast of a dove, and bade her a "Good-morning, my dear child." Love never knew whether she answered her or not. She went home in a sort of ecstasy, as of first love.

The squire's lady was in reality her first love. However fond she might be again of others, the affection would go forth in a worn channel. The girl heard that tender voice multiplying into infinite cadences of love and comfort in all the voices of the spring day. Love's cheeks were so flushed and her eyes so strange with happiness that even her father no-

ticed it when she sat opposite him at the dinner-table.

His mind had been intent upon his afternoon discourse, when suddenly he looked up as if at a touch upon the shoulder. His daughter sat before him just as usual, dressed in her little homely gown of a dull drab-color, with never a ribbon bow to brighten it. Her pretty, fair hair, braided so smoothly and tightly that the very color seemed compressed, was crossed in the usual flat mat at the back of her head, and brought over her ears in two satin-like folds, with high lights of polish at the sides. Her father saw nothing unusual in her except that blue shining of eyes which seemed almost wild, and that flush of cheeks which seemed almost fever, and an involuntary curving of lips into smiles which seemed almost levity.

First the parson inquired of his daughter if she were ailing, and then if she were in a state of mind befitting the day. To both inquiries Love replied dutifully, her color deepening, to the former with a respectful negative, to the latter with a modest hesitancy of hope that she might be, which

"LOVE NEVER KNEW WHETHER SHE ANSWERED HER"

was reassuring. However, her father continued to gaze at her now and then in the same curious and anxious way. He looked not only at her face, but at her dress and her hair, as if he saw them for the first time. He continued to gaze at her in the same fashion later on when they walked to the meeting-house for the afternoon service. He seemed to see the patient, sober young figure at his side with ever-recurring surprise. He scanned again and again the homely dun-colored gown, falling in scanty folds to the clumsy little shoes, the poor bonnet tied with dull ribbon. Then he looked from her to some gayer figures moving along the road with flutters of bright streamers and flounces.

Love would have been disturbed by this unwonted notice of her father had not her whole mind been intent upon the squire's lady, who was not there, indeed, but whose presence seemed more vital to her than that of any who sat under the parson's preaching. Until the sermon began she watched anxiously for the object of her adoration to enter, and when she became certain that she was not coming, she felt a

pang at heart the like of which she had never known before. She could have wept when she saw Master Richard Pierce coming up the aisle alone. She could not bear to look at the squire's pew; once when young Richard's persistent gaze of admiration forced her unwilling attention, she almost scowled at him, so sad and impatient was she, and jealous of her own self for the sake of the squire's lady. However, after a while she became in a manner reconciled to her disappointment, and fell to musing tenderly over past joy, and building air-castles for the future.

Love's face then took on such an expression that the boy in the squire's pew gazed at her as if fascinated, seeing for the first time the dream of love in a young girl's face. Richard that day managed to be at the door of the parson's pew when Love emerged; he cast a keen though somewhat shamefaced glance at her, but she did not see him at all. "I don't think that girl is very pretty, come to see her close to," he reflected, on his way home. He resolved not to take the trouble to look at her again, with the unconfessed mas-

culine assurance of her annoyance in that case.

Love would not at that time have known whether he looked or not, having eyes for his grandmother only; and the next day but one something happened to distract her still further. Upon that day Love had the first great and beautiful surprise of her life. She had been alone since morning, as she had been the day before. On Monday and Tuesday of every week the parson travelled to neighboring towns, where they had not the benefit of regular Sabbath services in a church of his own denomination, and gave them a week-day rendering of his Lord's-day sermon. On Tuesday afternoon Love grew weary of her needlework, and thought that she would have a change of task by way of harmless recreation. So thinking, she went up to her chamber to get a sampler which she was working. When Love had crossed the threshold of her chamber she stopped short with a gasp. There in her little chair sat a doll, not the old rag doll, but a new, resplendent creature—a very ideal of dollhood. No unskilled hands had ever fash-

ioned this radiant thing of blooming wax and real flaxen ringlets, of sweetest smiles of baby candor and innocence, of blue eyes intently beaming at the whole world of child-women without a special glance of favor for one, of pink satins and ribbons, of fine linens and laces. Love stood looking, her eyes dilated, her breath coming short and quick. At length she gained courage, and went nearer and knelt down before the wonderful thing. Her face was rapt. It was long before she dared to touch the doll, to do anything but drink in its beauty with her eyes and embrace it with her soul. Finally she rose, with a great sigh of delicious terror, took up the doll, and seated herself. As she sat there, with the little flaxen head on her shoulder, fingering with gentle, reverent fingers the delicate mysteries of the fine apparel, she was, for the first time in her life, in a state of actual bliss. She had experienced ecstasy at the caressing touch of the squire's lady and her loving words, but this was fruition and realization of the vague sweet promise of that touch and word. Love did not doubt for one minute that

the doll came from the bountiful hand of the squire's lady. She reasoned away easily enough all difficulties in the way of its having been brought secretly to the house and deposited in her chamber. Love had that order of mind which springs to conviction, and afterwards proves the route to it by a facile imagination. Old Aunt Betsey Ware was then living at the squire's.

"Aunt Betsey," reasoned Love, conclusively, "is well acquainted with this house; she knows well where my chamber is, and I have been at work in the kitchen, where I could not have heard any one enter, had they stepped softly." Moreover, that very forenoon Love had seen Aunt Betsey hurrying down the road, with head averted, as if she did not wish to be noticed. Love *knew* that the squire's lady had given her the doll. When she heard her father open the door she rose without a second's hesitation, and still clasping the doll, followed him into the study before he had seated himself at his desk.

When the parson turned at the sound of the opening door and saw his daughter standing there, with the great doll in her

arms, a strange expression which she had never seen came over his face. But Love did not heed that, neither did she fairly know the matter of her father's answer to her quivering statement concerning the doll, and her pitiful petition that she be allowed to keep it. In truth, it was a long and somewhat stilted speech which Parson Lord made to his trembling daughter, and it was not singular that Love, in her agitation, should grasp only the gist of it—that she might keep the doll. Love, with her New England shamefacedness as to all demonstration, only dropped a prim little courtesy, said "Thank you, sir," and went out, with the doll's pink face looking over her shoulder; but there might well have been a perceptible darkening of the room, so much joy went with her.

Love that night was fairly possessed with affection and gratitude; she loved her father as she had never loved him before, and he seemed nearer to her. She had not mentioned her belief that the squire's lady was the donor of the precious gift. She thought, jumping at that conclusion as she had done at the other,

that her father must know it as well as she. Who but the squire's lady could have given her the doll?

Love then entered at once upon a new epoch in her life. It seemed a strange thing that the possession of a plaything of childhood should all at once transform her character from that of a child to that of a woman, but such was apparently the case. Love never played, in the strictest sense of the word, with her doll; she never tended it with that sweet make-believe of motherhood in dressing and nursing; but the doll surely sent her heart into blossom, being perhaps the little stimulus of love needed for that end. At this time there came into the girl's face that expression of sweet intelligence and gentle comprehension, instead of the mere innocent outlook of childhood. People meeting Love in those days used to look at her carelessly, as one looks at any wonted object, then look again and again with growing wonder, as at a change which they could not define. Some, after meeting her so, said she had grown tall, some that she had grown pretty, some that she grew to look more like her

mother, or father, or Cousin Daphne. Whatever they said, people noticed her more. A few weeks after she had come into the possession of her doll, the squire's lady, one morning, sent over Aunt Betsey Ware with a formally worded message.

"Mrs. Squire Hawkes desires her compliments to Miss Love Lord, and would be pleased to have her company at tea this afternoon," said Aunt Betsey, with a fine and consequential pucker, and Love could only courtesy in unquestioning gratitude and acquiescence, like one who is bidden to an audience with a queen.

That very morning Master Richard Pierce had departed for college, and his grandmother, feeling sad and lonely, had bethought herself of the parson's sweet little daughter whom she had noticed so often in meeting, that it would be a comfort to have another young face at her tea-table that night.

Love had never been in the squire's house since the advent of this second wife. This was to institute a new order of things. She sat at the dainty tea-table opposite the squire's lady—the squire himself was

confined to his room with rheumatism—ate gingerly and delicately of the cream-biscuits, the quince-sauce, and the pound-cake. She sipped her tea from the blue china cup, with timid lifts, over the rim, of blue eyes at the kind and gracious face opposite; she spoke modestly when she was spoken to, and if she volunteered a remark, did so with a sweet deference which was pretty to behold. The squire's lady was even more pleased with the child than she had thought to be.

"She is a dear child," she told the squire when Love had gone, and she was in his chamber mixing the sleeping-cup for which she had a dainty hand. "She is a dear child. I mean to have her often to tea. 'Tis a treat to her, too. I hear the good parson keeps her close and is over-strict with her."

"Did she tell you so?" asked the squire, beginning to sip his spiced and comforting drink from his silver cup.

"No; she said nothing; she never would, unless I mistake her greatly," replied his wife. "I had it from Aunt Betsey, who formerly lived there." The squire's lady,

beautiful and gracious though she was, still got some savor to life from a little harmless gossip.

"Well, 'tis true enough," said the squire, "true enough. The parson has driven her with a mighty tight rein, and taught her to shy at the first scent of the devil." The squire had been in his day, and was still, a great lover of horse-flesh. "Why, bless you, my dear," said the squire, "I don't suppose that child ever had anything but the drippings of the contribution-box to eat or wear or make merry with. Every cent that the parson can save goes to foreign missions. Why, he sells every apple in his orchard — all except the windfalls — and sends the proceeds to India's burning strand; never one left for that poor child to have a bite of, fine apples too, a rare kind, brought from overseas by his grandfather. I've tried to graft from 'em, and couldn't. I don't suppose that child ever has a lollypop or a sweet-cake unless it's given her, and I don't know but her father would make her sell it then and drop in the penny next Sabbath day. Never a ribbon flying, or a frill setting her off. I've

noticed her myself. I used to know her mother; used to think sometimes—I was perfectly satisfied with my own wife, you know, my dear—but I used to think that if I had been a young man, and my wife had married somebody else, I would have known how to look out for her better than the man who had her—one of the prettiest girls anywhere about. I wonder if the parson intends to send his daughter to Burmah or the Fiji Islands? Well, he is a good man, and he has stepped along in his path of duty without a kick or a shy, and I suppose he is sure of finding his heavenly pasture at last. I wish some other people were as sure." The squire finished his cup as he spoke, and handed it to his wife for replenishment.

"It would be a cruel thing for him to send that little wild rose of a girl to any of those deadly climates; she looks as if she might have inherited delicacy from her mother too. I can't believe he will," said she, tilting the china pitcher carefully. "I shall invite her to tea again next week. I think the poor child will be benefited by it."

So it came to pass that every Wednesday afternoon Love went to take tea at the squire's house. Her father gave his consent, Love could not help thinking, with a certain constraint of pleasure at the invitation. "The squire's wife is a godly woman, and, I hear, a notable housekeeper; her example may profit you in some things, as your mother's would have done," the parson said.

Love thought that her father seemed pleased when some fresh gifts, which she attributed, like the others, to the bounty of the squire's lady, arrived. A few days after her first tea-drinking at the squire's, on a warm night in early May, there was a loud knock at the front door, and when Love answered it, no one was there, but a dainty package was swinging by a cord to the latch.

Love, after opening it in the sitting-room, carried it to her father, who sat over his sermon in the study, and displayed, with rapture and terror at what he might say, the fine India muslin for a gown, the beautiful blue ribbon to tie around her waist, and the little morocco shoes. Her

father, much to her astonishment, did not withhold his permission for her to keep the gifts, yet he spoke almost sternly regarding them, and impressed upon her her duty in not placing undue importance upon such frivolities, in view of the serious life work before her.

Love went clad in her new finery to take tea with the squire's lady, and her heart was in such a flutter of gratitude she made no expression of it, except by an eloquent look at her friend when she praised the beauty of her gown.

"Why, my dear, what have we here, a little white rose instead of a little Quaker lady?" the squire's wife asked, smiling at Love, fluttering before her in her muslin frills; and Love only smiled back at her, and blushed with modest pride and affection.

Love had a delicacy, perhaps exaggerated and misplaced, about returning open thanks for surreptitious benefits. She said never a word to the squire's wife about the gifts. Indeed, a number of times Mrs. Squire Abner Hawkes gave the child presents with no pretence of secrecy; there were three old gowns of her own among

them—one, the pride of Love's heart, of a blue figured satin. Love altered these gowns to fit her slender shape, and wore them to the admiration and somewhat to the wonder of all beholders. They thought it strange that Parson Lord should allow his daughter to go dressed so gayly, especially to the house of God. Love, who was henceforth always a bird of fine plumage, never talked much about these showers of surreptitious benefits to her father. She never mentioned the squire's lady in that connection, except now and then to remark upon her kindness, once especially when she wore for the first time the remodelled gown of blue figured satin. It was on a Wednesday, when she was going to take tea at the squire's, and it was four years after her first visit there. The squire's wife was a faithful friend, and Love a faithful admirer.

Parson Lord might have pleaded, with truth, the strength of the temptation, had he felt some purely temporal pride in the appearance of his daughter as she stood before him in that gown, shimmering with blue lights from shoulder to heel, and her

lovely head shining with a golden crown of braids. In fact, a smile of that utter weakness and fondness which would have better suited her mother's face came over her father's, to Love's wonder. But he enjoined her as sternly as ever not to allow her heart to dwell upon such vanities, but to remember that it was only her poor dying body which was so adorned, then turned again with his usual grave dignity to his sermon.

Mr. Richard Pierce was to be at the tea-drinking that afternoon, and Love did not anticipate the occasion with quite as much pleasure as usual. Now, she thought, it would be good-bye to her pleasant sittings and her confidential talks with the squire's lady. She had confessed as much to her friend, who had only patted her cheek fondly and smiled. Love was afterwards afraid that she had been rude and forgetful of the claims upon her gratitude and deference. There, she had actually as good as told her that she was sorry her grandson was coming home, when she had not seen him for so long. Mr. Richard Pierce, having developed within himself an

amazing spirit of independence, had been away the greater part of his vacations, earning money as tutor, and possibly in other capacities. There were those who claimed to have seen Mr. Richard Pierce, the squire's step-grandson, following the plough on a farm twenty miles away like any farmer's son. During his last vacation he had been in the old country with two boys whom he was fitting for college; the one before that, when he had been home for a few weeks, Love had been housed with a quinsy sore throat, and had not seen him. Indeed, with the exception of a few chance encounters with him at his grandmother's, when he had just arrived or was just leaving, the girl had not seen him at all.

When she reached the squire's house, and entered the stately old sitting-room, hung, as to its walls, with dim old oil-paintings and blurred engravings in heavy frames, furnished with old mahogany pieces reflecting the light, as in little pools, from their polished surfaces, it was at first so dark to her, coming out of the afternoon sunlight, that she could see nobody. The shutters were nearly closed, because the squire's wife had

a headache. Love saw her friend's face smiling dimly out of the gloom, heard her voice greeting her fondly, and felt her soft lips on her cheek; then she was presented formally to Mr. Richard Pierce, and courtesied vaguely before a bowing shadow. After Love had removed her worked muslin cape and her bonnet, she seated herself and took out her needle-work—a fine handkerchief which she was hem-stitching for her father, having coveted a little daintiness for him as well as herself. She worked industriously, answering modestly and prettily the squire's wife when she spoke to her, and frequently giving her fond glances; but she looked very seldom at Mr. Richard, and replied in gentle but cool monosyllables when he ventured to address her.

The young man could scarcely take his eyes from her, though he strove hard not to stare rudely. It seemed to him that he had never in his whole life seen anything quite so fair and wonderful as this girl, who seemed to sit in a sort of blue radiance, with a shaft of sunlight from the open upper half of the shutter gilding her head. All the courtly ease of manner for

which he had been quite famed among his associates deserted him. He heard his voice tremble when he addressed this unresponsive girl; he knew that his remarks were boyish commonplaces. It seemed to him that his grandmother's fair guest was in a mood not of maiden shyness only, but of decided aversion towards himself. He wondered in what way he could have offended her so soon. He wondered if she simply objected to him on the score of his personal appearance. It had always been considered fair beyond the average, but it might easily not be so regarded by her. Richard was not a large man; he considered that fact uneasily. He straightened himself to his fullest height when he crossed the room to open a shutter. However, his pains were thrown away; Love did not look at him at all. Still, although she was apparently oblivious of his presence, she was, in reality, fully aware of it.

The moment Love had entered the room, she had been conscious of a strange and pungent odor. She did not know what it was, but Mr. Richard smoked tobacco, and the scent of it was in his clothes. Love did

"LOVE FELT HER SOFT LIPS ON HER CHEEK"

not find it disagreeable, but she perceived it with every breath she drew, and it gave her a strange impulse of maiden rebellion, quite out of proportion to the cause, as if this man were fairly forcing his presence upon her, making it a part of her, whether she would or not.

Love, with a little impatient air foreign to her, removed the lid from a potpourri-jar on a stand near her, and bent her face over it. The scent of rose leaves, lavender, and spices seemed like a reassertion of the flavor of her own maiden individuality, which this man in his tobacco-scented garments, with his glances of hitherto unknown masculine pleading, was striving to overcome.

"It is too pleasant an afternoon for you to sit here in this dark room with your needle-work," said the squire's lady, presently. "Put it away, my dear, and Richard will take you out for a stroll in the garden."

Love started. "Thank you," she faltered, "I would rather remain here with you, if you please."

"Do as I bid you, my dear," repeated the

squire's wife, with her air of gentle authority which no one ever gainsaid.

Love, with no further demur, folded her needle-work and put it in her bead bag, and went with Mr. Richard into the garden at the back of the house.

Up and down the long box-bordered paths they paced. Love kept her eyes downcast, and face turned, so that only the pink curve of it was visible to her companion. She answered in soft monosyllables, a yes, sir, or a no, sir, when he addressed her with anxious deference. It spoke well for her charms that this young man, who had been heretofore treated very kindly by her sex, should have had a relish for this strolling in his grandmother's garden with one so sparing of responsive words and smiles. But Mr. Richard Pierce, far from appearing bored or dull, wore a look of rapture, as he paced the tortuous garden paths, Love's blue flounces rustling against him, no matter how far she shrank away, the pungent odor of the rank box, which was waist-high in places, in his nostrils, and now and then, like the melody triumphing over the swell of the bass,

a breath of lavender from Love's garments.

They threaded the green maze of the garden, Richard more adoring at every step; he held Love's parasol jealously between her face and the sun. It would have pleased him, doubtless, had the snap-dragons in the garden beds been real ones, that he might have slain them in her defence. He ventured to pick a nosegay and offer it to her. She accepted it with courtesy, and when they returned to the house, gave it to his grandmother.

The tea-drinking that afternoon was a sore embarrassment and trial to Love. The squire was away, and his lady's headache had waxed so severe that she had been obliged to retire to her room and leave her guest to sup alone with her grandson.

So she and Mr. Richard sat alone at the table, Love behind the tea-tray with its silver cream-jug and sugar-bowl and blue cups and saucers. She poured out the tea, tilting the silver pot with a dainty turn of her round elbow, and inquired politely as to the number of lumps of sugar, but volunteered scarcely a word beside.

She sipped her tea delicately, and made a pretence at her biscuit and a glass of syllabub and a square of sponge-cake, but was all the time anxiously furtive as to Richard's progress, that she might rise from the table.

Even after tea Love was not as soon quit of her admirer as she had expected, for he must needs walk home with her to guard her from the deadly perils of the village street at dusk. She began to fear that she would not be rid of him at her house door, knowing that it would be incumbent upon her, unless she violated her sense of courtesy and hospitality, to invite him to enter. However, the young man, desirous as he might have been to accept the invitation, had the wisdom to refuse.

When Mr. Richard Pierce returned to Boston, some six weeks later, to take up the study of the law, Love had smiled in his face a few times, she had addressed him of her own accord upon as many occasions as he could count on his fingers, and twice when returning in his company from tea-drinkings at his grandmother's, she had strolled with him a half-mile past her

house. Once, coming on some errand for his grandmother, and having met with no response to his knocks, he had peered around the house and caught a glimpse of something blue through the trees in the apple orchard. He had followed up that glimpse of blue, and found Love seated with her needle-work in a natural arbor made by the growth of a wild grape-vine over an old apple-tree, and had ventured to throw himself on the grass at her feet. Love cast a startled glance at him, half rose as if to run away, then settled herself and resumed her needle-work. Love's eyes were so intent upon this work that presently the young man dared still further. He gently laid hold of the hem of her blue muslin gown and kissed it fervently.

Love was on her feet in a flash, and her work—a lace tucker which she was embroidering—her scissors, her emery, her thread were on the ground. "I will never come here again, never, never," said she, in a voice between anger and tears, and then was gone, flying like a blue-clad nymph through the green distance to the house.

There was a certain shrewdness about Richard Pierce, although he seemed such a humble lover. He doubtless was abashed and conscience-stricken before Love's indignation, but he argued hopefully from her declaration that she would never visit the arbor again. "She must have thought of the possibility of my meeting her here," reasoned Richard Pierce.

Richard was to leave for Boston the next day but one. The following afternoon he repaired full of hope to the grape-arbor, reaching it by a circuitous way across the fields, lest Love spy him from her window, and so not be able to excuse her coming to herself.

Richard waited long, but Love did not come; finally he repaired boldly to the house and knocked; but no one opened the door. The parson was away; and as for Love, she had been weeping so bitterly that not for the whole world would she have faced Richard Pierce with her red eyes.

Richard came again that evening, and then the parson admitted him, and ushered him into the study, concluding, as a matter

"HE VENTURED TO THROW HIMSELF ON THE GRASS AT HER FEET"

of course, that the young man was there upon some errand connected with his soul's salvation.

Richard, after a period of solemn waiting, on the parson's part, for the unburdening of his spirit, inquired somewhat awkwardly if Miss Love were at home. The parson directly inferred that he had come on some errand for his grandmother, and replied that his daughter had retired to her room, suffering with a severe headache, but that he would deliver the message in the morning.

Richard, for very shame before this man so unconscious of his selfish designs, must needs plunge himself still further into deceit and invent a message, and thereby also accomplish a purpose of his own. He took out of his pocket a neat little parcel in silver-paper, and stated wickedly that his grandmother desired her compliments to Miss Love, and here was a little gift which she begged her to accept, the said gift being a most exquisite and dainty tucker of wrought lace, and a pair of embroidery-scissors, and an emery of painted velvet in an ivory case, for all of which

treasures he had ridden hard that morning to the next market-town.

Love, up in her chamber, knew perfectly well who was down-stairs; she heard him come and heard him go; and although she would not go down to see him and bid him good-bye, she wept because she would not.

The next morning, when her father gave her the parcel, she knew at once from whom it had come, in spite of that deceptive message. She colored so hotly that her father looked at her in a puzzled way, and she never thanked Madam Diantha (she had come to call the squire's lady by that name), though here was a fine chance with such an openly presented gift.

That night in his prayer the parson betrayed the fact that, however oblivious he had seemed, he had possibly conceived suspicions. He prayed fervently to the effect that his beloved child might ever be mindful of the daily fulfilment of her duty to the Lord. He quoted Saint Paul in terms rendered somewhat covert by sacred imagery; he declared the blessedness of going into the world and preaching the gospel to

every living creature in preference to the joys of this life. He petitioned that she might not forget the example of her sainted sister, that pattern of early piety, and might have strength to follow in that path which she would perchance have trod had her life been spared.

When Love rose from her knees she was very pale. Up in her own chamber, she took the lace tucker and the ivory case, folded them carefully in the silver-paper, and put them in a box of painted satinwood which had belonged to her mother. Then she folded the blue muslin gown, whose hem Richard had kissed, daintily in a linen towel, and packed it away with the satinwood box in the very bottom of her chest.

Love did not sleep that night, and looked wan and pale the next morning. Even her father's prayer, which was a sort of triumphant homily upon the joys which await them who overcome, did not seem to raise her flagging spirits. Sometimes that prospect of pearly gate and golden street, of eternal chorals of triumphant praise, seem all too splendid to a little humble soul who

would fain have offered to itself a smaller reward for sacrifice.

If, instead of the sea of jasper and those pavements of gold, Love had had pictured some little door of home, and her mother standing in it with outstretched arms of welcome, it might have filled her with a deeper sense of comfort.

When Richard had been gone a week, he wrote a letter to Love in which he humbly begged her pardon for his boldness the afternoon before he left, and craved the honor of a correspondence.

Love had debated long as to whether her duty demanded that she show this letter to her father and ask his advice in the matter. Finally, being led to a decision largely by the reasoning that her duty it must be since it was such a sore trial, she took the letter to his study, and stood waiting at his elbow, a patient, downcast young figure, while he read it.

The candle-light flickered over the parson's long, pale, heavily corrugated face as he read. It was a face expressive of all the stern resignation and persistency in sacrifice, and of none of its triumphant self-con-

sciousness. Most truly did Parson Lord serve his Maker through pure obedience to His will, and never for the sake of his own. Finally the parson folded the letter, and stated his mind to his daughter, with his usual circumlocution of scriptural imagery. When he had finished, Love courtesied, took her letter, and went back to her chamber.

Poor Richard Pierce received no answer from his divinity, but, instead, a lengthy epistle from her father, assuring him of the receipt of his distinguished favor, which had been submitted to his inspection by his daughter, for whom he had, he begged leave to say, views connected with her spiritual welfare and her true duty in life which rendered it inadvisable, according to his poor judgment, for her to engage in a correspondence of the nature proposed, which might perchance cause her to waste precious time and strength which should be devoted to higher aims, and possibly in the end divert her mind from the favorable contemplation of the one true and acceptable sacrifice of her life. The parson concluded with a few words of pious exhortation to his young friend.

It was quite possible that Richard felt some irritation at that very sweet docility, which he would have so admired if directed towards himself, which led Love to show his letter to her father and allow him to answer it. He did not again subject himself to a similar rebuff, nor endeavor to see Love until the following summer.

Then, at the first sight of the girl, grown far prettier, and with a helpless blush and tremor before his eyes, he felt his resentment vanish, and his admiration and love revive. However, he progressed not at all in his wooing. If he went to call upon Love, he was entertained by her father with a relentless persistency of pious conversation, and he went many a time to the grape-arbor in the hope that Love might be there with her needle-work, but she never was. During the three weeks he was at home she came only once to take tea with his grandmother, and then her father came for her, and himself escorted her home.

Richard could not but feel that he was avoided, and finally went back to Boston, resolved that he would waste no more

thought upon a girl who so persistently flouted him.

After Richard had gone, Love grew thin and pale. The subtle inconsistency of reasoning power of her sex was strongly marked in her. Underneath all her keeping to the letter of the law she had a feeling of wonder and grief and injury that her lover should so take her at her word. She would have had him come when he was told not. She would have had him force her to a *tête-à-tête* in that grape-arbor, and make it out of her power to say him nay. She would have had him correspond with her when such correspondence had been forbidden, and somehow ease her conscience of any blame. She would have had him take her love all the more, since she withheld it. She told herself that he did not care now; he had seen a fairer face in Boston; she would sternly put him from her mind, and strive to gain sufficient earthly bliss in the hope of that of heaven. Now and then she talked to her father of her uncles in Burmah and India, how old were their wives when they accompanied them, how old was it necessary for a female

missionary to be before the American Board would think it judicious to send her to those far-off lands? Reuben Lord had not always that expression of quick sympathy and joy with which he might have been expected to hear remarks so evidently tending towards the accomplishment of his cherished wish. Instead, he looked at his daughter with a sternly anxious knitting of brows, and replied that it was not so much a matter of years which was in question, as preparation and fitness of spirit and body to perform such work with acceptance to the Lord.

Love reflected humbly that her father considered that she was not spiritually fit for so great a trust; of her bodily state she thought not at all. She wondered why the squire's lady looked at her with such wistful intentness; she wondered why she always insisted upon her drinking a glass of port-wine when she first arrived at her house.

In those days more mysterious gifts than ever were showered upon the girl—a warm fur tippet for her delicate throat, a great muff wherein to nestle her little hands, a

warmly wadded cloak, a hood of blue silk edged with swan's-down, and many luxuries to tempt her appetite — oranges and pineapples, and often a plump partridge or quail.

Love's gratitude to the squire's lady seemed to warm her whole heart. She often speculated as to the advisability of thanking her friend for her anonymous gifts, and once she consulted her father. "Do you think it advisable to thank a person for a gift who has given it secretly, sir?" she asked. And her father stared a little, and replied:

"No, daughter; no, certainly it is not advisable," and was again intent upon Doddridge.

All winter, when the stage-coach came in with the mail, Love had a forlorn hope that it might bring a letter from Richard, but it never did. Sometimes the squire's lady used to read extracts from her grandson's letters to Love, both to her delight and her fear. Always her heart was beating loud in her ears with the fear lest Richard had written of some beautiful Boston lady who had won his heart. It was in

such wise that she betrayed herself one afternoon in late June.

It being a fine day, she and Madam Diantha were walking in the garden when the squire came with the mail, and there was a letter from Richard.

The squire was a fine, handsome old gentleman, red-cheeked and clear-eyed, with a silver fleece of hair. Though he limped somewhat on account of his rheumatic joints, yet he advanced with an almost boyish impetuosity. He was of rather smaller stature than his wife, who moved with slow state between the roses, in a wide inflorescence of lavender flounces and softly floating laps and frills of lace.

"Open the letter at once, my dear," cried the squire, "and let us hear if the boy is coming, or if some fair Boston lady has him at her silk apron strings."

Love had moved aside in the garden path to make room for the squire, and Madam Diantha saw the girl's face go white and red.

"Read it aloud, my dear, if you please," repeated the squire, eagerly.

His wife began to read in her soft voice.

The box in that place was as high as Love's waist, and some branches of roses were hooping over it. She turned her face away and smelled of a rose as she listened.

The letter was short. Richard could not come just yet, not until next month, possibly not until August. He was very much occupied; the weather was very warm. He had been to dine at Mr. Solomon Purdy's house the week before, and was to go there to a party to-morrow. Mr. Purdy had two daughters, most amiable young ladies, and a son whom he found a most desirable companion—

"'Tis one of the most amiable young ladies!" interrupted the squire, with a loud laugh. "An amiable young lady and a pretty little apron, and Mr. Richard Pierce stumbling at the length of the strings. I knew it. She has him fast. Well, 'tis hard lines for us when we thought to see the lad's face at the table a month ago, and now— Why, Diantha, my dear, what is the matter with the child?" For Love was half hanging over the green wall of box, like a broken rose branch.

"Why, my dear, what is the matter?

Are you ill?" cried Madam Diantha, and put her arm around the girl, supporting her tenderly on her broad, motherly bosom. Love was gasping faintly, and her lips were white.

"What do you think is the matter?" asked the squire, anxiously: he was very fond of Love.

"It is nothing, I think," said his wife; "she is not very strong, and the sun is hot. Will you please go to the house and get the camphor-bottle on my dressing-table?"

The squire's lady put her mouth close to the girl's ear when her husband had gone. "My precious child," she whispered, but said no more of comfort; she dared not, since she knew not but the squire's surmise was correct. So she only kissed and patted and soothed as best she could, and repeated that the sun was hot, and she not strong, and no wonder that she was faint.

Poor Love would have given the world to run home and hide herself, but she responded, with a proud impulse towards concealment, to her friend's subterfuge. She owned that she had felt the heat of the sun; she submitted to all that was done

for her, and remained to tea as usual, eating obediently as much as she was able of a little bird which the squire had ordered to be specially prepared.

"What ailed the child?" the squire asked his wife, after Love had gone home. "No, don't say the sun, my dear, unless you spell it with an o," and the squire laughed with boyish glee at his own joke.

"Hush, my dear, we have no reason—" his wife began; but he nodded obstinately.

"The poor little soul was distressed at the mention of the amiable Purdy," said he; "but I hope you told her that it was nothing particular."

"Oh, but, my dear, it may be!" said his wife.

"I don't believe a word of it," declared the squire, stoutly. "Well, if the boy should want her, and she him, I would venture ten to one that the parson would try to separate them with the contribution-box."

The next week Love forced herself to go to the squire's, lest they suspect the reason if she stayed away, but after that she did not go any more. Then July came and

passed, and August was there, and Richard returned.

Love saw him first as she was walking down the street. He was out driving with his grandmother and the squire. He had come unexpectedly the night before. When Love first lifted her eyes at the roll of wheels and saw Richard, she went so white that Madam Diantha gave an involuntary start as if she would go to her. She thought for a second that the girl would fall. But Love recovered herself quickly, and courtesied prettily, and they had passed.

Richard's grandmother glanced covertly at him, but he looked quite unconcerned, and her heart sank. However, Richard had seen, and the image of Miss Catharine Purdy, which he had rather urged upon his heart of late, faded.

Love wore that day a white muslin gown —one of her mysterious gifts—a little white cape, and a hat with a white ribbon; she looked for all the world like a flying white flower as she came down the street, her white draperies blown in the wind.

The squire had been shrewdly observant.

"The parson's daughter looks more like an angel than a thing of flesh and blood," he remarked, presently, "and I fear she'll be one in earnest if they don't look out for her."

Richard stared at the landscape. "Is she out of health?" he inquired, in a somewhat constrained tone.

"She was always delicate, dear," his grandmother replied, evasively.

"Not like this," maintained the squire.

That evening, when he and Richard were sitting together after supper, he turned suddenly upon the young man with a motion of defiance, as if he were throwing secrecy and prudence to the winds. "Well, my boy, your grandmother would have me say nothing, but I am going to get to the bottom of this. Our little Love Lord fainted away when your grandmother read a letter of yours in which you spoke of the Misses Purdy something particularly, and we knew— Now, sir, if you have trifled—"

"Trifled, sir!" cried Richard, staring. "Why, sir, she will have none of me. She has shown me so plainly that there is no mistaking it."

"Then it's the parson," said the squire, reflectively.

"No; it is she herself."

"Go there and see her, and you will find out that I am right, my boy," said the squire.

"I go not the second time where I have as good as had the door in my face, though it was heaven, and an angel shutting it," replied Richard, and was true to his resolution for some little time.

Poor Love stayed close at home, and always, when the weather was fine, repaired of an afternoon to the grape-arbor, and sat there until tea-time, with an eye of wistful hope for a young man coming across the field; but he never came.

But one afternoon, during the last of August, Love went into her father's study, bringing a letter in which Mr. Richard Pierce begged her to be in the grape-arbor at eight o'clock, for the purpose of conversation upon a matter pertaining to them both. He concluded by stating that he would consider her failure to be there as final, and would henceforth obtrude himself no further upon her, whose obedient servant he would ever be.

Parson Reuben Lord read the letter, while his daughter looked at him with that same expression with which she had pleaded for the doll.

"Daughter, you know what my will has been for you from your youth up," said the parson, solemnly.

Love went out without a word; her father heard her sob on the stairs. She ate no supper, though a little crock of honey had mysteriously come for her late that afternoon. She went up to her room at half-past seven o'clock.

Parson Lord stood listening at the foot of the stairs leading to his daughter's chamber; now and then he heard a stifled sob. He put foot on the stair, as if to ascend, then drew back; at every sob his own face was convulsed. At last he took his hat and went out, shutting the front door softly.

That night the sky was overcast and the dusk was early. When Richard, at eight o'clock, crossed the fields, all the trees were forgathering in shadows, and all white flower bushes and white house walls in the distance seemed luminous.

Long before he reached the arbor he saw something white shining therein, and his heart leaped for joy, he thinking it was surely Love's white gown and she had come. But when he went in, it was only a soft lavender-scented mass of silken shawl.

"She has been here and gone," thought Richard, in a great turmoil of grief and wrath. "She has been here and not waited. I will have no more of her. If she loves me not, I will not follow her any longer; and if she loves me, she has no spirit which is worthy of the love. The clock has not yet struck eight, and she did not wait—"

Then, just as Richard spoke, the town-clock struck the half-hour after eight. And here it may be said that the next day, when the Boston stage-coach came in, there was great amazement all over the village to find that the town-clock was a half-hour fast.

But Richard Pierce, that night when he heard the half-hour strike, went straight to the parson's house and let fall the knocker with a bold clang, and when the parson came, demanded to see his daughter.

"She has retired, I fear," replied the parson, who was strangely pale, and whose voice quivered convulsively. "Will you walk into my study, sir?"

But Richard would not come in, and would see his daughter at the door.

Love did not know the voice in which her father called; she asked, tremblingly, who had spoken.

"Come down, daughter," said her father, still in that strange voice. "There is some one at the door who is desirous of speaking with you." Then he went into his study and shut the door.

Love went down, and Richard's face shone white framed in the doorway against a background of night gloom. He flung an arm around her and drew her outside.

"We have had enough of this, dear," he said, shortly. "If you love me, tell me so now, for God's sake!"

"Oh, it is not right! I fear it is not right!" Love gasped, and trembled in his arms.

"Let the right alone. Tell me!"

"I must not!"

"Let the must not alone. Tell me!"

"Yes," said Love, with a sigh, and then tried with a faint assertion of maiden dignity to ward off Richard's kisses. "It can be no more than—this," she whispered, brokenly. "We cannot be — married, Richard."

"Why not?" demanded Richard. "Why not, sweetheart?"

"Father—father has vowed— He does not wish me to marry, Richard."

"Well, marry you will, nevertheless, sweetheart."

"Never without his consent. I cannot, Richard."

"With or without, you shall marry me, Love; but he will consent."

"Oh, he will not, unless—" Love looked with sudden courage in his face. "Oh," she whispered—"oh, Richard, if you would only be a missionary!"

Richard Pierce laughed so loud that the gay ring of it penetrated to the parson in the study. "I will not be a missionary, and yet marry me you shall, now I know that you love me, sweetheart," said he; then, before Love knew it, they were standing before her father.

"Sir," said Richard, speaking with a fine manly air, "I should have come to you before and asked for your daughter's hand had she not been so desirous of following your wishes instead of her own, and concealed her feelings from me so well that I judged it to be useless. Now we know that we love each other, and I beg that you will give me your daughter for my wife."

"My daughter has long known that my plans for her were otherwise than the married estate," said Parson Lord, looking past them and speaking with stiff lips.

"Is the soul of your daughter yours to command in a matter like this, sir?" inquired the young man, hotly, and yet with some show of deference.

"I cannot give my consent," Parson Lord said, and turned to his sermon.

"Cannot you reconsider this, sir?"

"I cannot give my consent," repeated the parson. "It is final."

"Then," said Richard, drawing Love's arm firmly through his own, "marry without your consent we must, sir, for marry her I will, now I know that she loves me."

The next Sunday the banns between Richard Pierce, Esquire, and Love Lord, spinster, were published—not proclaimed from the pulpit, but copied neatly on a fair sheet, and hung in the frame used for that purpose beside the meeting-house door, where all who entered might read. The parson might have discerned a greater spirit of astonishment and gossip in the faces of his audience than of pious attention to the precepts of the gospel, had he been interested to decipher it.

His plans for his daughter were well known, and here were her banns published. Had the parson yielded unto the pleading of earthly affection, or was this without his knowledge or approval? Public opinion rather inclined to the latter view, although far from sure that the banns could be set up, even with the squire to manage matters, without the parson's knowledge. Love was not at meeting, but Richard Pierce was sitting between his grandmother and the squire, and holding up his head with a gallant air, looking straight at the parson, as if he were weighing every word of the discourse.

The banns were published three Sundays, and on Monday following the third, the squire, the squire's lady, and Mr. Richard Pierce drove in the coach to Parson Reuben Lord's house. When they entered the study, having been ushered therein by the parson with a grave dignity, Richard looked around anxiously, but Love was not there. He glanced imploringly at his grandmother. "Where is Love, sir?" she asked the parson, in her sweetly imperative voice.

"In her chamber," he replied. When he was dead, Parson Lord would be no whiter.

"I will call her," said Madam Diantha, and called "Love! Love, dear child!" And when the girl did not come for the calling, she went up-stairs, and found her weeping and moaning that she could not wed without her father's consent, and he would never give it, and if he would, he would fly in the face of his own conscience, and bring a curse upon himself for breaking his solemn promise to the Lord.

Thus the poor child, in her bewilderment of love and conscience, until the squire's

lady would hear no more, but bathed her eyes and led her down-stairs to Richard, who took her hand with an air as if he challenged the whole world.

Then Squire Hawkes spoke to the parson. "Sir," he said, "my grandson loves your daughter, and she returns his love. The banns have been published for the requisite length of time, as you are aware, and they stand before you humbly beseeching that you give them your blessing and unite them in matrimony."

"I cannot do so, sir," replied Parson Lord, in a set, sad voice. "I cannot, sir."

"May I inquire why not, sir?"

"When my child was born, I solemnly dedicated her to God. I vowed that she should be set apart for the service of the Lord, should she be spared to me," replied the Parson. "I can break my vow no more than Jephthah of old."

"Damn Jephthah!" shouted the squire, who had an uncompromising tongue when aroused. "You are mad, sir."

The parson remained silent.

"Will you, or will you not, marry them?" demanded the squire.

"I cannot."

"Will you give your consent, then?"

"I cannot."

Love was clinging weakly to her lover's arm. The squire faced them suddenly. "'Tis the rankest folly," he cried, "and the cruelest! What are you, Reuben Lord, to dispose of your daughter, heart and soul, as you propose? How dare you come thrusting your damned covenant like a wedge between two young things who love each other in the fear of the Lord, and refusing to make them happy, because you are afraid you will go to hell for it? How dare you tamper with the holiest feeling of the human heart? Here is your daughter, an angel if ever there was one, loving this young man, and ready and willing to honor and obey him all the days of her life, comfort him in sorrow, and nurse him in sickness, are you not, sweetheart?"

Love nodded, sobbing.

"And here is my grandson, with all his heart set upon loving, cherishing, and protecting her in sickness or health, and cleaving to her for better or worse, are you not, Richard?"

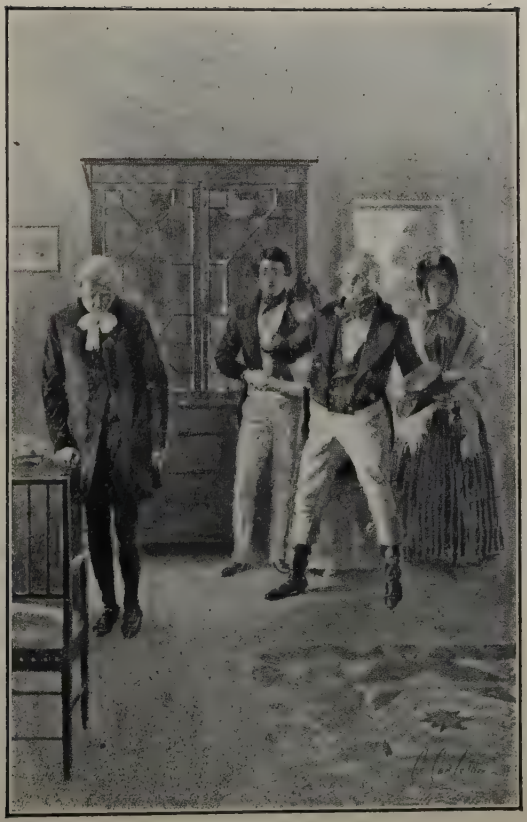
"Yes, sir, I am," replied Richard, with a start of amazement.

"Then," said the squire, his voice changing suddenly from a tone of easy interrogation to one of solemn proclamation, "in virtue of the authority vested in me as justice of the peace of this township, I pronounce you man and wife."

The squire gave a loud laugh of triumph, which he checked suddenly as he saw Parson Reuben Lord's face. It was shocked beyond words, and with a strange expression of guilt.

"Before the Lord, sir," cried Squire Hawkes, "neither your daughter nor my grandson nor my wife was a party to this, nor I myself, until the fancy struck me. I saw in a flash 'twas the only way; unless she had been trapped thus, she would never have brought herself to wed without your consent."

Parson Lord went over to his daughter, kissed her solemnly on her forehead, said "God bless you, my daughter! May you and the husband you have chosen dwell together in the love of the Lord, and may the day be sanctified to you!" and went out.



"'TIS THE RANKEST FOLLY,' HE CRIED, 'AND THE CRUELEST'"

A crowd which had gathered outside, gaping silently out of the shadows, stood back in a very hush of wonder when the bridal party emerged from the parson's house, got into the coach, and were driven away. "She's coming! She's married to him!" said one exclaiming voice, and then no more.

For days the village was thrilled to its fullest capacity for excitement by the wedding of the squire's grandson and the parson's daughter; but no one ever knew the full particulars, for principals and witnesses kept them to themselves.

Everybody agreed that the parson aged fast after his daughter's marriage, and that his whole character seemed strangely changed. Whereas he had moved among his people, discharging his religious duties towards them with a stern rigidity of faithfulness, he now bore himself with a meek lovingness which caused folk to turn and stare at him as at a stranger. Moreover, his sermons lost their directness of application concerning the justice and righteous judgments of the Lord, and some feared lest he might be falling off in the doctrines.

Aunt Betsey Ware, who kept house for him, said never was such a change in mortal man before, and when a sour-apple tree begun to bear sweetings, 'twas a sure sign that it would blossom next spring in another world. She was right in that case, for Parson Reuben Lord died very suddenly the spring after his daughter's marriage.

Love was sent for, and came with her husband, and mourned for her father, though in somewhat unwonted fashion. It was as if she grieved more sorely for that father whom she had never had than for him whom she had lost.

Then, a few days after the funeral, she found among his papers his journal, which she read, and had therefrom a revelation. When her husband came in she ran and clung to him, weeping and trembling in a passion of remorseful love and pity.

"Oh," she cried—"oh, Richard! it was father—it was father!"

"What do you mean, sweetheart?"

"It was father who gave me the doll, and not Madam Diantha. It was father who

gave me the pretty gowns and the bonnets and the ribbons. It was father who gave me everything! Oh, Richard, it was poor father! Look at this—look!"

Richard took the parson's journal and read, here and there, where she indicated:

*March* 6.—I have purchased the doll. Alas! I am weak and selfish, and under the sway of my natural affection. The price of the toy should have gone elsewhere; but the heart of the child is sore, and I cannot have it. Oh, her face as she stood there holding the old treasure of her childhood, which she had found, and which I could not let her keep for very consistency in discipline! Daphne was too hard upon such a tender heart of such a little girl.

God forgive me if I have erred through too great love for my child! Methinks I could have been burned at the stake in Thy cause, I could have been broken upon the wheel, but this martyrdom of pain in the heart of the child of my love I cannot bear.

*March* 7.—She looks as I have never seen her; the joy in her face causes my heart to leap. I have given her the toy in a

manner secretly, hoping that she will not confound me with her innocent delight and thanks, which would convey to me such reproaches; and she was delicately mindful of my wish. She is wise beyond her years. How can I crave forgiveness when I do not truly repent, remembering the child's face and the joy in it? Right or wrong, I would do it over again. Oh, my poor heart!

*July* 8.—Have purchased a gown of white muslin for my daughter. The ornament of a meek and quiet spirit should have been sufficient for her, but she was not attired as others of her age, and it perchance has tried her: the heart of a maid is a tender and unknown thing. Oh, my weak and degenerate nature! May it not foster in her too great love of dress and the pleasures of the world; for myself it matters not, so she be innocently glad.

*September* 6.—She is grieving because of that youth to whom her heart has turned, as I have known for some time, to my great sadness. What will become of that tender heart, yielding so helplessly and so guilelessly unto the great call of life? I

cannot give my consent; I dare not break my vow unto the Lord. Herein, at least, I must stand firm. She has no appetite. I have purchased delicacies for her. It may be that I do wrong, when the heathen starve for the milk of the word; but she is my only child.

*January* 9.—She is very poor in health. She shivers in the cold meeting-house. I have purchased a fur tippet for her, and a large muff, and a wadded cloak at a price which would have done incalculable good in purchasing spiritual raiment for the needy in foreign fields. The child does not put me to shame with her openly expressed gratitude, but takes her gift, as usual, with her sweet docility and meek grace.

*March* 18.—I have to-day purchased a new gown of fine texture and a pretty color. She still pines and grieves, and I strive to render her content with these little gewgaws, which, I have understood, sweeten the greater lacks of life to the feminine heart. May God forgive me for yielding to this so great weakness, and striving to temper the sorrow which may be ordained for her good to my daughter, and even per-

chance awakening thereby a love for vanity in her heart!

*July* 26.—The youth upon whom she has fixed her affections is in the village; she is watching for him and he does not come. Can I keep to my resolution and see her unhappy?

*August* 27.—All is over. I have yielded to the strength of my paternal love. They have met and plighted their vows, and by my means. I myself, in spite of everything, have brought about a meeting between them, and that by methods which bring me to shame. I resorted to subterfuge, even to deception. I cannot recall even to myself the means which I used, involving, as they did, deception and trickery, without the deepest mortification and the most painful prickings of conscience, and yet I acknowledge, to my still deeper humiliation, that I do not regret the result which was brought about by such means, and I confess that I am sure, in the depths of my guilty and self-betraying heart, that, for the sake of her happiness, I would repeat, as long as I drew the breath of life, my folly and my fault.

*September* 30.—My daughter is wedded to the man of her choice. The letter of my vow I kept, yet broke it undeniably in the spirit. I humbly confess to my Maker my joy and exceeding happiness that the vow be not fulfilled, sinful though it may be. In spite of my backsliding, my lack of steadfastness, and my weakness of the flesh, I have upon me a deep peace and certainty of good to come which will not be gainsaid by any self-blame. I marvel greatly if I perchance have rightfully estimated the love of God towards us, which may—and I be not led astray by my evil imagination—acknowledge as its own offspring all the natural affections of the human heart, and the human weakness therefrom be thus forgiven by the divine love.

# The Tree of Knowledge

# The Tree of Knowledge

"THE Tree of Knowledge," so called by the people who dwelt in its vicinity, stood on the border of the turnpike road to Boston. It was an ancient elm, as venerable as any prophet, with the wide benediction of his giant arms and the shelter of his green mantle on a hot noontide.

And there was a great hollow in the mighty trunk of the tree, and therein was a sack of calf-skin, cunningly fitted for protection of its precious contents against rain and dampness. Every day the driver of the Boston stage drew in his mettlesome steeds beside the old elm and plunged a hasty hand into the depths of the calf-skin sack. There was no post-office in this tiny settlement, and therefore no way of sending or obtaining the mail except through

the friendly offices of the driver and the tree.

The stage dashed down the turnpike every night with a rattling roar of wheels, which carried far, and caused the men in distant hay-fields and wood-lots to stand and listen with hollowed hands at ears, and remark, with that small and primitive triumph which comes from the unquestionable evidence of the senses, "There's the stage-coach."

Every night, just after the passing of the stage, came young Annie Pryor, to see if perchance she might glean anything from its leavings for herself.

Annie would hasten down the road in the summer-time, ruffling to the wind like a rose, with her muslins and laces and ribbons. In the winter season she went clad from neck to heel in a great red cloak, which parted the pale dusk like the red breast of a robin as she danced along.

No matter how fast she came, she always paused a moment before she thrust her little hand into the secret place of the old elm in search of a letter, as if she were collecting her courage for a possible disappoint-

ment. But always once in a fortnight, and sometimes oftener, she found there a letter for herself, addressed in a handwriting very fine and clearly cut, with elegant curves and shadings, but always large, with even an exaggeration and affectation of boldness, to prove beyond doubt that it was a man's. Always when Annie secured her letter, and turning the superscription to the light, saw the handwriting, a soft blush came over her face and a look of rapture and wonder into her eyes.

She always hid the letter in the lowest depths of her pocket, and never by any chance read it until after she was home, and sometimes not until she went to bed, and was sure that nobody would see her face until the look which it had worn during the reading had faded away. However, there was nobody in the house to see her except her elder sister, Cornelia, and the servant-woman, Deborah Noyes, who had lived with them ever since Annie was born; but their eyes were very sharp and pitiless with love.

There never had been and never would be letters like these, according to Annie

Pryor's judgment, which was biassed by the wisdom of utter innocence of the world, and a fancy as holy in its picturings as a Fra Angelico's. As all women were angels to him, so were all men angels to her. Annie read these letters as she read her Bible, with her heart and her pulses aglow indeed with a warmth which confused her, but with her imagination in the holy of holies, and crowning the writer with an aureole of beauty and sanctity.

She had never seen him in the flesh, and had no idea concerning his identity. The name signed to the letters was clearly a fictitious one—"David Amicus." In those days sentiment was in its fulness of glory, and had not yet overlapped its own height to the descent of the ridiculous. People, especially women, regarded its farthest flights in their correspondence seriously, and with most ardent approbation.

So Annie Pryor, reading with flutterings and palpitations innumerable these epistles signed with a name evidently inspired by Scripture and Latin and sentimentality, and full of such lofty conclusions that the

writer seemed more than mortal man, could he exemplify them in himself, was in a rapture of enthusiasm and admiration. She was in love with a man whom she had never seen, and who represented to her mind something between a Messiah and a Crusader.

But, after all, the affection of her maiden heart was awakened by nothing except the love which made itself evident through all the lofty verbosity of sentiment, like the strong sweetness of honey. Annie tasted, smelled, and inbreathed the fervent love and the tender glorification of herself in the letters, and her heart leaped to meet it, all in the dark, but none the less surely.

Annie never answered these letters; she never dreamed of such a thing; indeed, there was no address given. She was quite contented to respond silently to all this graciousness of affection, not having as yet arrived at such an understanding of love that its need of herself could occur to her and fill her with distress.

Annie had received her first letter from her unknown admirer when she had just passed her seventeenth birthday. The

week before, she had heard of the marriage of the only girl friend whom she had ever known, who had moved to another village with her parents two years before. Annie returned from the neighbor's where she had heard the news, her eyes big with wonder and a certain vague trouble.

She seated herself at a window and remained for some time, looking out without speaking. Then she said, slowly and timidly, to her sister Cornelia, who was sitting opposite embroidering a fine cambric frill for her, "Cornelia."

"What is it, love?" asked Cornelia, softly.

The two were half-sisters; there was a difference of many years in their ages, and a great dissimilarity in their figures. Cornelia was extremely tall and full of a willowy sinuosity, and Annie was almost as small and slight as a child, and as weakly pliable in her movements; still, the likeness to their common father was in their faces. Their voices were widely different too, Annie's having a thin sweetness of quality like a reed, with no reserve, and Cornelia's being not low, but hushed. Cornelia gave the impression of being reined in,

either by herself, in opposition to the urgings of Providence, or by Providence, in opposition to her own desire for bolting. She looked at Annie now with a mild gravity of expression, which concealed a quick warmth as of fire. "What is it, love?" she repeated, when the young girl did not answer at once, but still hesitated with that look of vague trouble in her eyes.

"Rebecca is married," Annie said, slowly.

"Yes," assented Cornelia, who never seemed surprised.

"She is married to a young man in Greenfield, where they went to live, her aunt Maria told me."

Cornelia saw that Annie's eyes were full of tears.

"Are you hurt because Rebecca did not write you about her marriage, dear?" she asked, tenderly.

"No; she has written me very seldom since she went away. Her aunt said she would write soon. She has been very busy making her wedding clothes. She has hemstitched and fagoted everything, and trimmed all her bed-linen with knitted lace." Annie looked at Cornelia with a kind of

abashed directness. "Cornelia, when do you think I shall be married?"

Cornelia smiled; then her mouth drew down at the corners. "In the Lord's good time, I trust, love," she replied.

"I hope it will be before long," said Annie, simply and seriously; "or maybe I shall not be married at all. I am seventeen —two months older than Rebecca was."

"Are you not contented and happy as you are, love?" asked Cornelia, and there was a delicate intonation of reproach in her voice.

Then Annie's heart smote her. "Oh, dear Cornelia," she cried out, sweetly, "of course I am happy and contented, but—" then she stopped again.

"I am contented and happy since I have you. I ask for nothing more. You have filled my cup of blessing up full, Annie."

"But I have no Annie," the younger sister rejoined, laughing childishly, "and when I am as old as you, Cornelia, I will have no Annie."

"There is nothing for you to do, for any woman to do, but to trust in the Lord about all such matters," Cornelia said,

sternly and with a certain dignity. "If He intends you to have a married life, He will send you some one in good season; if not, and He intends you to be single, you must learn to be contented. Every state has its compensations, and nothing is as unequal as it appears."

"Dear Cornelia," said Annie, abruptly, "was that why you did not get married—just because the Lord did not send you any one?" Annie spoke in a tone of the sweetest and most deprecating curiosity, her face flushing, but Cornelia turned pale as Annie had never seen her, and Deborah Noyes, who had come in and was sweeping the hearth, gave a frightened start.

"I would rather not talk about such matters, love," Cornelia answered, gently, and yet with an accent which filled the younger sister with pain and distress.

"Oh, Cornelia, forgive me!" she faltered out.

Annie had a feeling that she had outraged secrecy and delicacy, and all the more because old Deborah later took her apart and charged her never to ask her sister such questions. "There air things

which had better not be talked about," said the old woman, who had been married in her early youth, had the wisdom of experience, and regarded Annie as her own child.

"Oh, Deborah, I did not mean any harm!" Annie returned, piteously.

"I know you didn't," rejoined Deborah; "but there air things which is only betwixt folks and their Maker, and not to be spoke of by their nearest and dearest."

So Annie Pryor, being forbidden to speak, could only think, and as a result of her thought kept her love-letters secret when they began to arrive a week later.

Annie felt quite justified in her secrecy. The dear and noble unknown had signed what was evidently an assumed name; he did not wish his identity discovered, and she had the authority of her elders that there were subjects better not discussed, and between one's self and God.

So Annie hid her love and her letters, and grew and blossomed into fuller life, like a flower which conceals the secret of its growth from even those who tend and love it, keeping always the god that giveth

the increase hidden in the shadow of its own life. Annie had always been pretty, but now she grew into such a beauty that even the stolid farmer folk thereabout, men blunted with toil and the dull fitting of desires to means under the yoke of Providence, turned back to look at her, and the women grew reminiscent and comparative at the sight of her, and glanced in their looking-glasses.

However, she had very few admirers of any kind in this little place, scarcely more than the nucleus of a village. It had always been inconceivable to people why Captain Jonas Pryor, Annie's father, had settled there when he gave up his traffic on the high seas. It may have been that the loneliness and isolation of the place appealed to the man, used to the loneliness and isolation of the sea; at all events, he seemed happy there. However, he had Annie, for whose sake he had quitted his life work and turned his back forever on his good ship, and she was all-sufficient. Captain Pryor had always been a kind father to Cornelia, but she was not like little Annie, the child of his pretty second

wife, herself young enough to be his daughter, who had died when he was cruising off the coast of Ceylon.

After Captain Pryor came home he never let Annie out of his sight when he could avoid it, and he was as wroth as he might have been on his quarter-deck, when somebody suggested sending her away to school.

"I guess by the time she knows as much as her sister and I can teach her she will know enough for any woman," he said; "and as for putting that little tender thing in with a parcel of great girls not good enough to tie her shoes, I'll be damned first! I've sailed about enough around this world to get my bearings, and know about as well where the rocks and the quicksands be as the teachers and the parsons, and I guess I'll be full as faithful about shunting her off 'em as they. And as for the rest, I guess Cornelia has been polished high enough to give a little of her shine to her sister."

Cornelia was well fitted to teach her young sister, having graduated at a young ladies' seminary, and having been well grounded in the accomplishments, as well

as in some more advanced branches than were usually in vogue in such institutions.

As for Captain Pryor, being determined to keep his darling with him and avoid all necessity for self-reproach, he taught her the rude astronomy acquired during long watches on deck under the expanse of stars, and also, as well as he was able with no opportunity for practical illustration, how to navigate a ship.

He imparted to her his well-tested knowledge of geography, with sundry scornful dissensions from the maps in use. "I tell you all the way to know a coast is by sailing round it," he would say, emphatically, "and it goes out here where that fool has made it go in. Guess he would go to pieces before he had time to say his prayers, if he tried to sail where he has marked water. Don't you ever try to sail a ship according to such bearings, sweetheart."

In fair and mild weather little Annie used to sit with her father on the housetop, around which he had erected a balustrade, and she learned strange lessons of fact and fancy, having for a great treat the looking through her father's spy-glass at

the strip of blue sea visible on a clear day, and watching the sails moving along the horizon distance like clouds in the sky. But it did not last long. Captain Pryor was quite an old man, and the breaking-up of the ways of a lifetime shake the foundations of life. He died suddenly when Annie was still only a child, and she was left in the care of her elder sister. She was as safe as she would have been with her own mother. As fond as Annie's father had been of her, it would have been impossible for him to surround her always so impalpably and yet so completely, with such fine and discriminating tenderness. The tenderness of one woman for another is farther reaching in detail than that of a man, because it is given with a fuller understanding of needs. Annie was fenced and ramparted against all evils and roughnesses of life, in all the ways which the patience and loving cunning of two devoted women could devise. They kept her from all evil, and all knowledge of it. They saw to it that her feet were dry, and the food for her imagination clean. She had seen only the love-illumined side of her old sea-captain

father, whose knowledge of the wickedness on the face of the earth was as securely hidden from the innocent eyes of his daughter as if it had lain at the deepest bottom of the sea. She had never read a novel; she had had only one companion of her own age, a simple girl, whose life had been as sequestered as her own, and Cornelia had never left the two alone long, and taught Annie to tell her what they talked about. There were no young men in the village except one lout of a farmer's lad, who was beyond the reach of her imagination, or, rather, far short of it. Annie regarded him no more than she would have regarded a wayside tree, and he viewed her with Heaven knows what dull acquiescence of admiration, stepping out of her path as stupidly and unquestioningly as one of his own oxen. He being the only other of her own age in the village, it was not surprising that Annie was obliged to draw wholly upon her imagination for the original of her unknown lover. Her mind was an absolute blank as to his reality. She could not, search her memory as she would, recall the face of any man whom she had ever seen who in

the least answered to her conception of him. So she fed her love with her own fancy and the noble sentiments and words of ardent and respectful devotion transcribed upon the sheets of foolscap, and many a time, when she was ostensibly seated with her sister at work on her embroidery, she was holding sweetest communion with her lover in that farthest closet of secrecy behind silent lips.

Sometimes, however, since there were forces at work within herself of which she knew nothing, she was not quite happy, and there was a sense of insufficiency in her life. She was reaching the point where dreams would not content her. In those days she took to standing long at the gate in the evening and peering down the country road in the dusk, as if she were looking for some one, and on a moonlight night she sat at her window watching out over the pale illumination of the meadow, instead of going to bed. If the knocker sounded, her heart beat high with anticipation, and every footstep smote her ear like the prophecy of another. She prayed timidly not being sure that such prayers

were right, that her lover might appear to her at the elm some day, instead of his letter, and she became so agitated that she could scarcely breathe or walk steadily on her way thither. She reasoned that he might come on the stage, and wait there for her. Finally she became quite sure that he would do so, and every night arrayed herself with the daintiest care. Her mother had possessed an expensive wardrobe, which had been little worn at her death. Cornelia kept her own finery of youth only for her young sister, and Captain Pryor had been well-to-do for those times. Annie went clad in fine array, in shimmering silks and fine muslins and embroideries, like a princess, but they became her well as concerned her looks and her breeding and her birth. Both Annie's mother and Cornelia's had been of fine old Boston stock, with high claims to gentility.

Annie always waited, by her sister's instructions, until the stage was so far past that nobody could espy her, before she sought the tree; and thus it often happened that her dainty toilets were all unseen except by the loving women at home, who

would have thought her fair in rags. Sometimes a sense of impatience and futility came over the young girl as she tied on her hat before the looking-glass and arranged her brown curls to the best advantage. She longed, as naturally and innocently as she might have longed for water when thirsty, for the eyes of her lover to reflect her beauty, that she might see it with its best meaning. This little Annie Pryor, stealing palpitatingly down the road to the old tree, was feminine to the heart's core. No power of straining out of her natural line was in her. Noble sentiment was her spiritual bread, and love was her honey. She was fonder of her quiet needle than of any other employment, and her soul seemed to permeate to the farthest hem on her flounces, the scallops of her tucker, and the forked ends of her ribbons, such an entirety of prettiness she was as she walked.

It happened one afternoon in December, when Annie had just passed her eighteenth birthday, that the Boston stage was late, though she did not know it. She had sat in her favorite place by a window, embroid-

ering a pocket-handkerchief which she privately designed for a feature of her wedding finery, until it was past the usual time for the arrival of the stage; then she rose.

Cornelia looked up from her work at an opposite window. "Wrap yourself up warmly, love," she said, "for it looks cold outside."

Annie put on her red cloak and wound a furry tippet round her throat before she set out. It was cold, and threatening snow. The sky hung low with gray clouds, and there was a stillness which shocked the senses like sound. The presence of the storm seemed to make itself felt, like the presence of life in a dark and silent room. It was almost night, but not dark; somewhere beyond the clouds was the full moon. This little human thing full of life and warmth hurried on like a spark of fire through the quiet of death and storm. She did not meet a living creature nor hear a sound until she was near the old elm. Then she heard the rumble of the approaching stage. "The stage is late," she told herself, in dismay, and did not know what to do. Then she reasoned quickly, while the

stage was drawing nearer, that she would not have time to go back and reach the turn into the lane where the Pryor house stood before it was upon her, and made up her mind to the only course of action possible. She stepped aside from the road, and sought the shelter of the wood at the right behind the great elm. The wood was composed of oaks, and white birches waving about in the dusk like white wands of conjurers. Annie went as far into the wood as she deemed necessary to screen herself from prying eyes on the stage-coach, and hid behind an oak, folding her red cloak tightly around her slender form. Then she waited until the stage rolled up. The driver alighted, approached the tree, and was busy for a minute or two beside it. Annie could see quite plainly, as she peeped around the trunk of the oak, the stage with its team of four horses drawn to a slanting curve beside the road. There were no outside passengers except one man on the box, who was holding the lines. She thought that not many had ventured forth on such an inclement day, and with a thrill of her usual disappointment she

thought that her unknown lover had not arrived.

She waited until the driver was back in his place again and had hallooed to his horses, which had moved on with a mighty rattling and jingling; then she stood out from behind the oak and peered around fearfully. All at once she became conscious of something unusual. She had felt, rather than heard, something in the wood near her. She looked behind her, then to the right, then to the left, and saw what it was —a man and a horse standing as motionless as an equestrian statue in a cleared space among the trees.

Annie did not cry out, but she seemed to shrink within herself, and folded her arms with a curious involuntary motion, as if she were fairly hugging herself for protection. The man looked sharply at this slender fair thing, her poor pretty face, wild and white with terror, intent upon his, and remained motionless for a moment, as if uncertain what to do.

Then he stepped forward with a courtly lift and flourish of his broad slouched hat, and all at once Annie's fears fled, for she

knew that *he* had come. She looked up, innocently and quite fearlessly, into the dark, handsome face bent over hers, though the soft pink mounted high to the roots of the curls on her forehead.

"I hope I have not alarmed you, madam," said the man, with the utmost gentleness and deference ; and he smiled as he spoke, and Annie's heart quivered under the smile as under a caressing hand.

Still, she answered with considerable dignity, her own young copy of her elder sister's soft state when addressing a stranger. "I was alarmed for a moment, sir, because I had not expected to see any one here," she said ; and her voice sounded to the young man like a flute played by some nymph of the winter woods.

"But you are not alarmed now, I trust?" he rejoined, gently.

"No, I am not alarmed now, sir."

The stranger held his horse by the bridle, and continued to regard Annie. She could not see his face plainly, because it was under the shadow of his broad hat, but she made sure that it was the face of the man of her dreams, and did not belie the senti-

"SHE LOOKED UP INNOCENTLY AND QUITE FEARLESSLY"

ments of his letters. In such a tumult of emotion was she that she felt herself hot and cold, and all her pulses were throbbing above her thoughts; but so fine was her breeding, and the instincts inherited from generations of gentlewomen, that she made no sign.

"Allow me to say that I think you are out rather late in such a lonely place," said the stranger at length, in a tone which he might have used towards a child.

"No, sir; it is quite safe," replied Annie. "I come here every night for my letters." She blushed as she said the last, and her eyes fell, since she made sure that he knew all about the letters. She knew that he must be David Amicus, and she wondered what his real name might be.

As she wondered, he told her, with another courtly bow.

"If you will permit me to present myself, I am Harry Carew, at your service," he said—Annie courtesied—"and I still think it overlate for one so young and fair to be out alone; and I will stand beside the road and keep watch that you are not molested

until you are safely home. You do not live far from here?"

"Only a short distance, sir; but I assure you that it is quite safe."

Annie, and Harry Carew leading his horse, went out to the border of the wood to the old elm, and Annie, with another courtesy, and a gentle "Good-night," and "Thank you, sir," started down the road.

But the young man called after her, with a half laugh. "You have forgotten to look for your letter," he said; and he laughed again softly, for he thought that it was a letter from a sweetheart that she was expecting, and that the sight of his own handsome face had driven it from her mind; for Harry Carew was not without vanity.

Annie turned back confusedly and thrust her hand into the hollow of the tree, but there was only one letter there, and that for one of the farmers. Then she went her way, thinking that Mr. Harry Carew had it in his mind to jest with her, since he must have known that there would be no letter there.

When Annie reached home and entered

the warm room, bright with the hearth fire, and the lamp hung around with rows of glittering prisms, beside which her sister sat, she turned her face away, as if to screen her dazzled eyes after the dusk outside, but in reality to hide her face until it should be under better control. Annie felt as if her meeting with Harry Carew was written in such plain characters upon her face that Cornelia would read all at a glance. She sat at a window and stared out at the night, though Cornelia asked her tenderly if she had not better draw near the fire. She sat there while old Deborah laid the tea-table in the dining-room, with musical clink of glass and silver, and her heart sank at the thought of poor Harry Carew out in the storm, which had begun: the snow was falling fast. She wondered if he would obtain shelter at one of the neighbor's, or if he would ride on to the nearest tavern: it seemed late for that. She wondered what Cornelia would have said had she asked him to come home with her, if it would have been maidenly to do so. She kept her eyes downcast when she sat at the tea-table opposite her sister, but

she felt that Cornelia was glancing perplexedly at her face. Cornelia thought that the girl had a strange and unwonted look, and speculated anxiously as to what it might mean. Annie was uneasy under her sister's fond and reflective gaze, and somewhat guilty. She thought that possibly she ought to tell her secret now, since without doubt Mr. Harry Carew would seek her at her own home before long, possibly the next day. Several times during the evening she was on the verge of confession. Once she said, "Sister—" then stopped.

"What is it, love?" asked Cornelia.

"Nothing," replied Annie.

Cornelia had a subtle sense of disturbance. The sudden repression of confidence from one soul to another may well produce a commotion like that from the stoppage of a wave. "You do not feel ill, I hope, love?" she said, uneasily.

"No, sister," replied Annie.

Annie lighted her candle and went to bed early. She wanted to be alone. The storm had come with all force, and the night was full of the white drive of the snow. The wind had arisen, and came in

a steady wall of advance from the northwest. Annie lay in bed listening to it. "It is a dreadful storm, and even a strong man might freeze if he were out in it," she thought. While she had no doubt, the simple romanticism of her nature making it almost incapable of interrogation towards events which coincided with her theories, she was yet somewhat bewildered at the strange advent of her mysterious lover. It was certainly singular that he had appeared in such wise. Annie had no knowledge of heroines of romance, upon which to draw for comparison, but she reflected vaguely that it might have been more according to the fitness of things had Mr. Harry Carew come dashing boldly up the turnpike, and knocking at her door, implored permission to pay his addresses, than for him to lurk in the oak wood on the chance of seeing her when the stage passed.

Still, she had no doubt that Harry Carew was the David Amicus of her letters, and her whole heart went out towards him with trust and love and the most fervent admiration. She considered him

as grand and handsome as a prince in his appearance, and as for his character, were there not the noble sentiments in his letters to vouch for that?

Annie recalled many to herself as she lay there sheltered from the storm in her maiden nest. She had many expressions, word for word, in her memory. Some which she specially admired and treasured ran after this wise—"To walk ever in the path of virtue and honesty, though the hedges set with cruel thorns press close on either side, is to my mind better than to walk in the path of vice, though there be room therein for the wide spreading of purple and fine linen, and the society of the gay and light-minded with whom to pass the time to eternity by song and jest." And another—"Constancy and the faithful keeping of vows and promises I enjoin upon myself, for I comprehend not how I can be false to another without also being false to my own self." And another—"I shun intemperance and impurity as I would shun the plague, for I am well aware that you could esteem me no more after my moral death than you could do

after my physical, and the wedded bliss towards which I ever look forward as towards an earthly paradise would be forfeited forever."

"There is no man in the whole world so noble and so good," thought Annie Pryor, though she had seen Harry Carew only once, and then at a disadvantage, on account of the dusk, and his slouched hat well over his flashing eyes; but by some unwritten law of love those eyes had found their way at once to her soul.

It was midnight before Annie fell asleep; then it was an hour or more before she woke suddenly, with the conviction borne in upon her that there was something unwonted astir.

Annie was timid, but was that night in a state of excitement and exaltation of spirit which was beyond ordinary fear. Without the least hesitation she sprang out of bed, ran to the window, and looked out. The storm was furious; all the night was a whirlpool of white crystals, yet made faintly luminous by the full moon. She could see dimly the yard in front of the

house, and the figure of a man plodding through the snow.

Annie hesitated, not knowing whether to awaken her sister and Deborah, or not; then she decided not. She knew who had come—Mr. Harry Carew, seeking shelter from the storm. He must be nearly spent. She did not see his horse; perhaps that had fallen down exhausted. It would take some time to arouse her sister; there might be some parley before he would be admitted, since they were three lonely women, and there were valuable silver and some jewelry in the house. While they delayed and talked he might fall fainting on the door-stone; she resolved that she would admit him herself.

Annie put on her clothes hurriedly, lighted a candle, and shading it carefully lest the light shine through the cracks of her sister's door across the hall, stole downstairs to the front door. She drew the bolt and threw the door wide open, and there was nobody there. Then she heard a slight noise in the north parlor, and ran to the door of that and opened it. The wind and snow from an open window came in her

face, and her candle would have flickered out had she not carefully shaded it. She dimly perceived a man's figure before her, and spoke at once, though in a hushed and tremulous voice. "Oh," said she, "I am sorry that you had to climb in the window! I am very sorry! I went to the door as fast as I could. I am very sorry!" Then, when he made no response, she spoke again, with the sweetest pity in her voice: "I fear you are overcome with the cold and the storm," she said, "you have been out in it so long. Please come out in the other room, where the fire is. It is covered, but I will soon have it blazing again, and the room cannot be cold yet. Please come out in the other room, and I will get some wine for you; I fear that you are almost exhausted."

Then there was a smothered ejaculation in return, which might mean almost anything; then silence. The shadowy figure of the man was motionless. Annie stood regarding him with hesitation and fear, lest he might be unable to do as she said, and might at any minute fall on the floor at her feet.

"Oh," she pleaded, falteringly, "I hope

you are able to come. Pray come, if you can, or — or — would you like me to help you?"

Annie made a timid motion towards the man as she spoke; then, to her intense relief, he answered her in a smothered voice.

"I will come," he said.

Annie led the way across the entry to the south parlor, which was the ordinary sitting-room of the family in winter weather, where the great hearth fire was kept, being raked over with ashes every night, and readily kindled anew every morning. Annie pulled a rocking-chair before the hearth.

"Please be seated, sir," she said, "and I will soon have the fire burning."

But as she went down on her knees upon the hearth the man pushed her gently aside and took the shovel from her hand.

"Nay, be seated yourself," he said: "this is no work for your hands."

"Oh, sir, I fear you are not able."

Harry Carew laughed faintly and confusedly, and went on with his work of raking away the ashes from the bed of glow-

ing coals. Annie lighted the candles, and he piled some sticks on the fire, which soon blazed. The room was full of light, and Annie looked timidly at her guest. He was very white, so white that she was confirmed in her opinion that he must be exhausted by his struggle with the storm; and, moreover, his face wore a strange expression, half of reckless mirth, and half of something else which she could not decipher.

However, his face, now seen fully, was very handsome and quite young. He had tossed his slouched hat aside and displayed his head of black curly locks. His clothes, though they were rough and sat upon him somewhat carelessly, had yet the air of a gentleman's. His short cloak, thrown back over his shoulders, disclosed a pistol in his belt, which was a common enough ornament for a gentleman travelling alone on horseback, and Annie thought nothing of it.

The young man, on his part, saw for the first time — for he had not fully seen her that evening—the very loveliest maid his eyes had ever beheld. She was clad in a sack

and petticoat of crimson wool, of which the fire-light and the candle-light made a rich flow of color, and her face was surrounded by the loose stream of her brown hair. Of such an exceeding fineness and delicacy was Annie's beauty that it had an unreal character, and led a beholder to doubt if he saw aright. The face of the young man surveying her became more and more singular in expression. He had a feeling as if a draught of wine had gone to his head, and he did not fairly know if he were in his sober senses or not.

"I am sorry that I was so long in coming to admit you," she said again, with sweetest apology. "I saw you from my window, and as soon as I could went down to unbolt the door, but you were not there. I am sorry that you had to climb in the window."

Mr. Harry Carew colored like a girl; he began to speak, and stammered, then laughed nervously to hide his confusion.

"I should have begged you to come home with me this evening, perhaps," said Annie, with a sweet and childlike directness, though she was evidently stirred with

maidenly modesty and embarrassment. "My sister Cornelia would have made you welcome, and—and—I knew, of course, who you were."

"What the devil can she mean?" thought Harry Carew, then checked even his reckless mode of thought before the tender innocence in her face.

"I am very sorry I did not," Annie continued, almost tearfully, feeling more and more distressed at her lack of courtesy. "I knew the storm was coming fast, too. It is dreadful that you wandered about so long."

"Oh, do not think of that, I beg of you," returned Harry Carew, in a choked voice.

"Please be seated," urged Annie, sweetly.

"No, no; thank you," he stammered out. "You—you are an angel. I never saw mortal woman like you. But I cannot stay. I must be back in Boston before to-morrow morning."

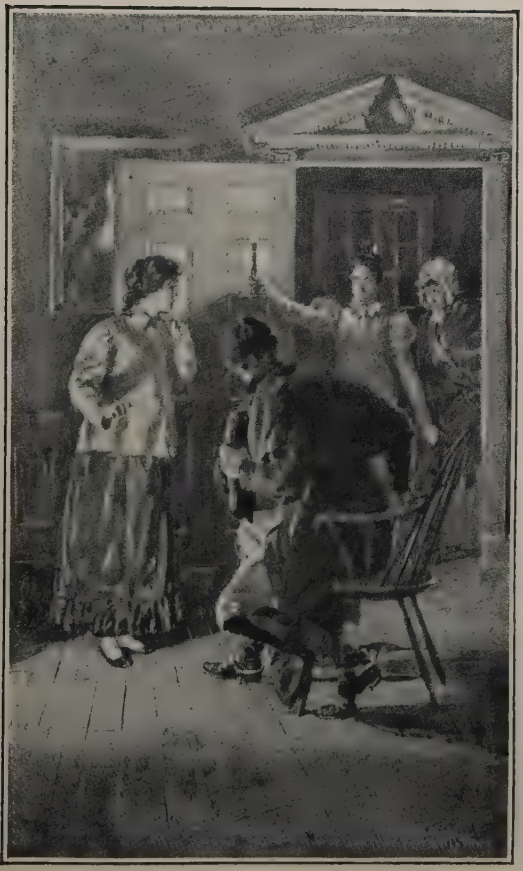
He reached towards his hat, then turning, saw Annie regarding him with a look of such utter alarm and wonder that he

started. Then with a gesture of the very helplessness of recklessness he sat down in the chair which she had placed for him. "Well," he said, with something between a laugh and a groan, "I will stay, and thank you for your hospitality, as I would thank an angel at the gate of heaven. But call your sister, child, for 'tis after midnight, and she does not know me as well as you do, for there cannot be two such miracles of trust and innocence under one roof."

Annie turned towards the door, but it was opened before she reached it, and Cornelia stood there, pale and stern and frightened, with old Deborah's nightcapped face peering around her shoulder.

Cornelia advanced into the room and stood staring, her head turning as with measured method, first towards her sister, then towards Carew, then back again. Her eyes were full of dismay and incredulity.

"Oh, sister—" Annie began, but Cornelia did not seem to hear her; her head was turned towards the young man, and him she addressed.



"CORNELIA STOOD THERE, STERN AND FRIGHTENED"

"Who are you? Why do you come here at dead of night in such fashion as this?" she asked, and her voice had the awful sternness of aroused gentleness. There was no lack of spirit in Cornelia Pryor, especially when she had her young sister to defend.

The young man, who had arisen at her entrance, opened his mouth to speak, but Annie anticipated him.

"Oh, Cornelia!" she cried out in a grieving voice, as if she would burst into tears. "Oh, sister, do not speak to him so! The poor gentleman is overtaken by the storm on his way to Boston, and he is almost exhausted; see how pale he is. Oh, sister!"

"Is this true, sir?" demanded Cornelia, with keen eyes on his face.

The young man bowed. "It is true that I am overtaken by the storm, and I begin to doubt the possibility of my getting through to-night; the snow has gathered fast, and my horse is somewhat jaded. She has carried me from the south shore this afternoon."

"Where is your horse, sir?"

"Tied to the gate yonder, madam."

"Did you knock? I did not hear you."

Then Annie interposed, with her eagerness like that of a child. "No, sister, he did not knock. I heard him coming, and I looked out of the window and saw him in the yard, and I—"

"Why did you not call me?"

"Oh, sister, I was afraid that he would fall down out there in the storm before he would be let in. I thought you might be frightened because we were all alone and there were the silver and mother's jewels in the house, and—and you did not know him."

"Do you know him?" asked poor Cornelia Pryor, with a gasp.

"Yes, sister," replied Annie, blushing, but looking bravely at Cornelia.

"What is your name?" asked Cornelia, turning to the young man. Her lips were stiff: she could scarcely speak.

"Harry Carew, madam."

"What is your native place?"

"Boston, madam."

"Are you a relative of General Carew?"

The young man's mouth twitched and

his forehead contracted. He looked whiter than ever, but he answered, presently, "I am his youngest son, madam."

A quick light of recollection flashed over Cornelia's face. "Oh," she said, involuntarily, "you are the son of whom I—"

But Harry Carew stopped her with a gesture of almost agony. "Oh, madam," he cried out, as if he were in an extremity of peril—"oh, madam, I beg of you to be silent! I beg of you to wait until I have had an opportunity to speak with you in private! I beg of you, by your womanly pity!"

Cornelia's face softened. "I have my sister to protect, sir," said she.

"And I will defend your sister with my life against any who offer her harm or insult, be he myself or any other man!" cried Harry Carew, hotly.

"Oh, sister!" said Annie.

Cornelia drew herself up to her full height. "Mr. Carew," said she, "we are a household of women, utterly helpless and unprotected. You are a stranger to me personally, though you claim to be-

long to a family whom I have known in times past; and it may be so, for you resemble General Carew, as I remember him, but I have no proof."

"Oh, sister!"

The young man pulled a letter from his pocket and handed it to Cornelia. "There is a letter received from my father not three days since," he said, "if that will serve as proof of my identity. I should have no object in coming by such a letter by unfair means, for it is of no value, since the golden words which it contains do not pass as coin of the realm."

Cornelia looked at the superscription on the great folded sheet.

"You are at liberty to read the contents," said the young man. "I beg that you will do so at your leisure."

Cornelia regarded him steadfastly, with the letter in her hand. "Admitting that you are Harry Carew," said she, "there are still grave reasons why I should hesitate about admitting you into such a household as this at such an hour, but I cannot drive you from my door in this storm, and I therefore bid you welcome

to a house which has never yet had its hospitality outraged or betrayed."

"And it shall never have it outraged or betrayed by me, madam," replied Harry Carew.

"Oh, sister!" Annie sighed, faintly.

"Deborah will fetch you the lantern and the keys," said Cornelia, "and you had best lead your horse to the barn and feed him. Then, when you return, you shall have some refreshment."

"Oh, madam," cried the young man, eagerly, "I want no supper for myself, only for my horse! If you will but give me a bed and shelter, it is all I ask."

"We send not our guests to bed supperless," replied Cornelia, with her mild stateliness of manner.

Mr. Harry Carew took the lantern and keys as directed, and when he had stabled and fed his jaded horse, had his own supper, served daintily with fine damask and all the silver tea things, and then went to bed in the bedstead of state in the guest-chamber of the Pryor house.

That was the great snow-storm, which became the folk-lore tale of a generation.

Once in a while a storm of the elements, like a storm of human passion, rages itself into immortality. The snow fell during two nights and the greater part of three days, and all the roads were impassable. Harry Carew remained in the Pryor house nearly all the week, otherwise he had stood a fair chance of perishing by the way. All the landmarks of stones and fences were lost, the trees stood branch-high in windward swirls, and the houses, with shaggy walls and pendulous eaves, like old men's beards, cowered low under great weights of snow.

Harry Carew worked manfully, fighting the snow with shovel and broom, defending the house of his entertainers as best he might against the onslaught of the storm. Several times the great chimney had to be dug out, since its cap of snow extinguished the hearth fire, and the house was thereby filled with smoke. The blinds and shutters of the northeast windows had to be braced, else the windows would have been forced in with the battering gusts of the storm.

"Only see how hard he is working for

us, sister," said Annie, with soft reproach, "and you hesitated about asking him to stay, though he would have perished in the storm."

"I was only fearful for you, love," replied Cornelia, in a troubled voice. Cornelia was very pale; she seemed to have grown thin in a few days.

"Well, you are not now; you have seen his letters, and you know there is not such a man anywhere. I am not sure that even father was as good as he is," said Annie, radiantly.

The morning after Harry Carew's arrival Annie had gone to Cornelia with her precious letters.

"What are they?" Cornelia asked, faintly, when she held them out towards her. She made no motion to take them.

"The letters he sent — the letters he wrote."

"The letters who wrote?" Cornelia spoke as if her voice were failing her.

"The letters that Mr. Harry Carew wrote," replied Annie, blushing, and looking at her with surprise. "Who else could have written them?"

"Take them away," said Cornelia, thrusting at the letters with her slim, trembling hand.

"Why, no, sister. I want you to read them; then you will see how good and noble he is," Annie said, in a hurt fashion.

"No, dear; I would rather not read them."

"Oh, sister!" pleaded Annie, in her little sweet voice, which had always won the elder sister from her own way. Cornelia took the letters, and the red surged over her thin face, and her hands shook as she opened them till the paper rustled like leaves in a wind.

Annie waited; then she confronted Cornelia with a look of triumph. "He wrote them, sister," she said, then started, her sister's face was so strange and ghastly, and so laboring with speech which yet did not come. "Why, what is it? what is it, sister?" she cried out. "Are you ill? Oh, sister!"

Cornelia motioned her away, trying to smile.

"Sister, are you ill?"

"No, no, love. Go now; take your letters and go. I want to think."

"You are not ill?"

"No, I tell you, love."

"Oh, sister, was there ever anybody like him? And you are not angry because I did not tell you before about the letters?"

"No, love," said Cornelia, patiently; but she did not look at Annie.

"I will never keep anything from you again, sister. You will not mistrust him ever again, now you have seen his beautiful letters, will you, sister?"

"No, love," Cornelia repeated: she was breathing shortly, as if she had been running.

"Shall I tell her? Shall I tell her?" she kept asking herself; but she told nothing, and Annie went away with her letters, rather puzzled and hurt by her sister's manner, but not seriously so. This young girl was cast on very simple lines, and with the lack of subtlety in her own nature came the lack of comprehension of it in others. She would always see the characters of her fellow-beings like pure colors, with no complexities of shadings and motives, and no amount of jostling by life would ever depose her from the first ground of observa-

tion from which her childish eyes had beheld the world and the things thereof.

She went away with her letters, and there was Harry Carew standing in the door of the south parlor, bowing low, and accosting her as if she were indeed an angel, as he had said, and with all the little savor of gentle mockery and merriment gone from his manner.

"Oh, believe me, I do not know how to express to you my gratitude, my more than gratitude, my heart-felt devotion, for the confidence which you place in me and the permission which you and your sister give me to remain," he said, fervently, with eyes of reverent admiration on her face.

Annie laughed gently. There was a soft blush all over her sweet face, which seemed to the young man like a tangible veil of maiden modesty which separated her from him. "Oh, sir," she replied, "it requires no trust after these letters! They bear testimony to what you are."

"Those letters?"

"Yes, sir. Have you so soon forgotten your own letters?" Annie laughed again, though in a puzzled fashion.

"My letters?"

"Yes, sir, your letters." Annie's face, surveying his, began to look grieved as well as puzzled, and she straightened herself a little at the same time.

Harry Carew extended his hand. "Since you say they are mine, may I see them?" he asked, almost timidly.

But Annie held the letters with a quick motion close to her bosom, and looked at him with a deepening blush on her cheeks.

"As you please. I would not look at them against your will," Harry Carew said, gently and humbly.

"You may see them," Annie said, in a whisper. Then she gave him the letters, and stood with her head averted while he looked at them, lest he read certain passages at the same moment when she should remember them.

Harry Carew unfolded the letters with trembling hands and glanced over them. His face changed as he read. "Who is this man, this friend of yours, who calls himself David Amicus?" he asked, abruptly.

Annie was cruelly bewildered at the question. She did not know if she should

be hurt or indignant. She did not answer at once, but glanced at him irresolutely.

"Well?" asked Harry Carew, harshly.

"Why, sir, you yourself! It is scarcely kind or courteous of you to make a jest of me," said Annie then, with something of dignity.

Harry Carew drew a long breath. "Believe me, I have no thought of making a jest of you," he said, earnestly. "I crave your pardon if I have seemed to do so. But tell me the whole story, if you please. How long have you been receiving these letters? How did they come?"

"But you already know, sir."

"But tell me over. I beg of you."

Then Annie half reluctantly, for she was still doubtful as to whether or not he was making a jest of her, told him the story of the letters.

When she had finished she scarcely knew Harry Carew's face, that she had seen it before, so softened it was, and full of sorrow and shame and tenderness. It seemed to her, also, that his black eyes were bright with tears; but that she doubted, since he

was a man, and she knew of no reason for them.

Harry Carew gave the letters to her. "Thank you," he said, and bowed, and went abruptly, turning his face aside like a girl, as if he wished to conceal it, into the south room, in whose door he had been standing.

Annie went away with her letters, somewhat puzzled and hurt by Mr. Harry Carew's manner, as she had been by Cornelia's, but never doubting anything. She reflected that he had probably some good reason for pretending surprise concerning the letters, as he had had for secrecy in the first place.

Later in the day Harry Carew and Cornelia Pryor had a private conference in the north parlor, whither she had led the way, that they might be secure from interruption. There was no fire in the room, and the white storm drove past its four windows, filling it with a pale gloom. Cornelia stood in the midst of the great square apartment, confronting her guest with a mild pitilessness. "I found a window in this room open last night, Mr. Carew," she said.

"I continue to offer you my hospitality, but it is best that we understand each other. Why did you come to this house last night?"

"I came to rob you, to steal your money and your jewels," answered Harry Carew, looking at her with face as white as if he were dead. Then suddenly, before she could speak, he had thrown himself on his knees before her. "Oh," he cried, "I beg of you never to let her know! I beg of you never to let your sister know! If you do, you will have snatched away the last straw that could save me from destruction."

"Your poor father, whose letter I have read, should save you from destruction, and not my sister," answered Cornelia, coldly.

"Oh," said Harry Carew, hoarsely, "I have read those letters, and I know what she thinks of me. For God's sake, never tell her what I am! Never let me see myself in her eyes as black as I am, lest I can never be anything else forever. Oh, I beg of you never to tell her that those letters are not mine!"

"Would you then deceive her, and add

treachery to your other sins?" Cornelia asked, sternly.

"No, no; I would make those letters true. I would grow to be what she thinks I am. I would reach the height on which I see myself in her innocent heart. Oh, I beg of you do not take away my last chance of salvation! Let me work and strive until I have made myself worthy of her."

"You have not known my sister one day," said Cornelia, coldly.

"How long does it take to learn to love an angel?" demanded Harry Carew. Suddenly a look of jealous anxiety came over his face. "Who wrote those letters?" he asked. "I thought, when I read them, that no man wrote them, for I never knew a man so good; but if any did, he has first right."

"I wrote them," said Cornelia.

"You?"

There was something fairly majestic about Cornelia Pryor, standing before him in her long black gown, which shaded as unsubstantially into the gloom of the room as a shadow. "I had in my youth a bitter experience," said she. "I discovered the

treachery and wickedness of man. I threw my heart away upon one who was unworthy, and I wanted to save my sister from a like fate. I wanted to fill her mind with such a pure ideal that there could be no danger. I endeavored in those letters to show what a man worthy of her affection should be, that she might love no other."

Cornelia Pryor disclosed her visionary and romantic scheme with a quiet stateliness and dignity which challenged criticism. Harry Carew stared at her incredulously, then he almost laughed, though the tears stood in his bold black eyes. "And then—and then," he stammered, "I came with the husks in my heart and my stomach, and she invested me with all those virtues. She greeted me, coming to rob her, as if I were the prince."

Harry Carew's face took on an expression of the most passionate devotion; his voice broke. "Bless her! bless her!" he said. "I will worship her for that till my dying day, if I can have no more.

"It is the first time I ever attempted to steal," he added, eagerly. "I hope you will believe that. Last night I was well-

nigh desperate. I had lost every cent at cards. I determined to rob the Boston stage. Then she came and saved me from that. I would have dropped dead first then.

"Then I had not a cent in my purse, and the storm came on. I did not know that she lived here; I thought she went to the house beyond. I have never attempted highway robbery or burglary before. I trust you will believe that. I beg you never to let her know what I came here for last night, as you hope for mercy. Let me have my chance to reach what she thinks I am; then I will tell her all myself."

Harry Carew went away nearly a week later. He saw Annie alone in the north parlor a few minutes before he left, but there were no words of love passed between them. He only held both her little hands in his, and looked in her eyes as if they had been indeed those of an angel, and who can say what angel of himself poor Harry Carew saw there?

"Good-bye," he said, "and he shall come back to you some day."

"Who shall come back?" asked Annie, wonderingly, and trembled under his eyes, which had meanings besides love which she could not fathom.

"The man who wrote the letters," replied Harry Carew. Then he kissed her hands and was gone.

It was two years before Harry Carew returned, and then in far different fashion from that in which he had come before. His father and mother were with him, and they all rode in the great Carew coach; and Harry had arrived at that fair after-estate of the prodigal son, and no question of his abiding. He was arrayed in purple and fine linen; he held his head high, and looked abroad like one who sees things as they are from the unwavering foothold of his own self-respect. Harry had just been elected to a high office in the city government of Boston. People opined that he would yet be the most prosperous of the Carews.

Then Annie Pryor and Harry Carew were married and went away, and the evening after they were gone Cornelia strolled

out to the turnpike, and then a little farther to the old elm, the "Tree of Knowledge," as the people called it. It was a clear December night; there was no snow on the ground, and the sun was setting redly. The limbs of the tree, with their mottle of gray lichen, reflected orange tints of flame, and looked like mottled orange snakes uprearing in triangular contortions against the sky. Cornelia stood under them, reflecting. She called to mind everything which had passed—about the letters, and Annie's love and wooing and wedding — and she wondered if it might not sometimes be better to guard the Tree of Knowledge with the flaming sword, instead of the gates of a lost Paradise.

Cornelia wondered, standing under the tree, clad still in the dress of splendid brocade which she had worn at Annie's wedding: there were gold and silver threads in it. The sun sank, and the orange light on the tree paled. Cornelia gazed down the darkening curve of road. Annie was wedded and gone, all her own romance was dead, and she was left alone; yet her peace did not fail her, nor her anticipation of joy

to come, for she had thrust herself and her own needs and sorrows so far behind her trimmed and burning lamp of love that she had become, as it were, a wedding-guest of all life.

Catherine Carr

# Catherine Carr

THE ninth day of August, 1814, was hot and sultry on the Connecticut coast. Ever since morning, old Madam Carr, Catherine's grandmother, had been presaging a thunder-tempest. Sitting on the north porch, knitting an interminable length of silk stocking, she had sniffed the charred dust of the field-grass consuming beneath the fierce sun, as in a very *auto-de-fe* of nature, and turned keen old eyes of suspicion upon the northwest horizon, where the thunder-storms were wont to brew. All day the northwest had been vague, as with dregs of color instead of cloud, for all the purple-blue of the intense sky seemed to have settled there. "There will be a thunder-tempest before night," said Madam Carr, in her deep voice, almost a bass, coming unexpectedly from

a slender old throat swathed in folds of delicate lace.

"Yes, grandmother, I think so," responded Catherine.

She was dressed in some thin stuff of an indeterminate pattern of purple stripes and garlands of pink flowers, faded and darned profusely, as was her lace tucker. Everything in the old Carr mansion was only held from the collapse of age by the timely stitches of thrift. Madam Carr's black satin was actually embroidered by her own cunning fingers in a rose pattern to conceal the threadbare places, and her black lace mittens were almost gone as to the original weave. Madam Carr always wore her black lace mittens of an afternoon, as ladies had been accustomed to do when she was young. She had come of a fine old English family which had not sought the New World at all until the colonies were nearly fledged for independent flight. There had been wealth and state in the daily life of Madam Carr, although now she lived in actual poverty with her granddaughter Catherine. The Carr estate had dribbled away through improvident fingers, until

there was little left except the old mansion on the outskirts of the village, and a few acres of scanty pasturage, and a wood-lot or two. Catherine had a brother, two years older than herself, who might retrieve the family fortunes, but he was fighting in Perry's squadron against the British, and his grandmother had little to say of him. Madam Carr was a Tory born and bred, and, if she had her way, would have set up the throne of England at the Capitol with no delay. She prayed in her closet for the English arms, and never asked if Catherine had heard from young Harry Carr, though she loved him well, and though she knew that his scanty pay, sent home as regularly as might be, kept her and her household alive. Catherine herself, from her early training, was not as true a daughter of the republic as she might have been in her principles, and had striven as best she might to dissuade her brother Harry. "Go fight for the one true country and the one true government," said she, with that gentle imperiousness which folk said was like her grandmother's, and became her well, but Harry would not listen.

"They have ground us into the dust," he declared, fiercely, "and now we will arise and let them see the stuff we are made of."

"'Tis British stuff," argued Catherine.

"British stuff grafted on to a tree of the West, till 'tis the noblest fruit of the whole earth," said Harry Carr, and was off in his blue uniform.

Catherine wrote to him, though her disapproval was still active. Catherine looked as her grandmother had looked when she was a girl. She was small and fair, with a face as round and innocent as a child's; but she bore herself like a queen, and had, at times, a severity of manner which no one, not even her grandmother, gainsaid. Catherine Carr had been sought in marriage by one Captain Miles Wadsworth, of the blood of the Wadsworth who had hidden the charter of Connecticut in the hollow tree.

Catherine had accepted him, and he had for some six months visited her as her acknowledged lover; then there had been high words, none but they two knew over what, and Captain Miles had sailed away

in his ship, *The Commonwealth*, to Liverpool. That was during the year before the war, and Catherine had not heard a word from her lover since. If she grieved for him, nobody knew. Now and then a swain with courting intent rode over from Stonington to see this damsel with a fair face and good blood in her veins, though no gold in her purse, but she would have none of him.

"Catherine will never be wedded," said Madam Carr, "but no one need scorn her for it, since 'tis not for lack of chances. 'Tis an honorable estate, when it comes with choice, and has been held by many a woman of our family." If the truth had been told, Madam Carr somewhat regretted that she had not held that estate herself. She had been a true and faithful wife to her husband, now dead some twenty years, but she had not been in love with him, and he was in her memory but an additional shadow cast by her fleshly life. She had been a Carr herself, having married her own cousin. She looked with favor on Catherine remaining in her single blessedness. "There is freedom and dignity in

it, child, let them say what they will," said she, "and the old place will feed you as long as you live."

Catherine Carr led her life of peaceful monotony of industry, and seemed content enough, though she was young and there was warm blood in her veins. The days for three years had dawned and dimmed with no change, except their own variety of eternity, but now this ninth day of August was to hold enough to spice a lifetime.

Catherine, when she waked that morning, had felt a strange quickening of her pulses and a turmoil of her whole mind, both as to its memories and its imagery of the future. An electrical ferment of storms and upheavals of present harmonies seemed to be in her little sphere of life, as well as in the greatness of nature. "There will be a thunder-tempest before night," said Madam Carr. "Something will happen before night," said Catherine Carr, but only to herself. All the forenoon she and old black Sylvy had been putting up little pots of currant jelly and jam. Her finger-tips were still rosy with the currant juice,

though she had rubbed them well. She sat that afternoon with her grandmother on the porch and darned a petticoat of fine red damask which had belonged to her mother.

"I remember well when your mother first wore that; she had just turned sixteen," said Madam Carr. "It is a handsome color, though not for this time of year."

"The people of this country like it not overwell, at this time of year or any other," said Catherine, with a laugh, referring to the red coats of the British soldiers. Catherine's laugh had a nervous ring, her delicate face was strained and tense, her blue eyes almost black. She kept turning an ear this way and that, as if listening; she glanced often at the road, visible through the lilac shrubbery in the front yard; all at once Catherine's whole face lightened and sharpened with attention like a hunting dog's. She heard a noise like the feet of a swift runner; then she saw one man, then another, and another, come pelting up the road; then a stout woman laboring behind with heavy joltings of hips like the

panniers of a donkey. Catherine recognized them for the landlord, his wife and son and man-servant, from the tavern a half-mile below. The tavern was a small hostelry of none too good repute, serving mainly as a resting and carousing place for sailors, for there was a good anchorage at that point. Catherine ran out around the corner of the house, through the lilacs, to the road, and her grandmother, knitting-work in hand, went after her, nearly as agile as she.

"What is it?" called Catherine, and her face was pale; for those were troublous times on the coast, with an enemy on the seas. The woman answered her, though she was scantest of breath.

"The British! The British!" she gasped out.

Catherine ran after her, grasping her arm and keeping alongside easily. "Are they come? Are the British come?"

"Their ships are off yonder, four of 'em, and a boat from the biggest—a-comin'—a-comin' ashore. Let go! let go!"

"Are the men going to Stonington to warn the town?"

"No; the town will be all in a light blaze in a half-hour. We be goin' to the swamp, where they can't find us. Best you and your folks go too, Catherine Carr. Get your teaspoons an' come. I have my half-dozen in my pocket. Let go! let go!"

With that the woman, the wife of John Tabb the tavern-keeper, wrenched away her arm, and was on with the rushing men.

"Oh, go to Stonington! go to Stonington! to warn the town!" cried Catherine, after them; but John Tabb pelted on with his stubborn face as if he did not hear.

"Go to Stonington! go to Stonington, Mr. Tabb!" shrieked Catherine. But John Tabb went on with a steady rush, like a panic-stricken ox, and they were all out of sight.

Catherine ran back to her grandmother, standing pale, but with a certain air of tremulous triumph, at the house gate. "We have nothing to fear, Catherine," said she. "There is no need for women of the Carr family to fear anything from British soldiers."

"I am not afraid," said Catherine, proud-

ly, "but the people in Stonington will have no time to defend the town. Grandmother, I am going to warn them."

"You will not go one step," declared Madam Carr. "The British will give them notice in time to remove the women and children; the men will stay and fight. What more would you?"

"There will be no time to strengthen the earth-works."

"Let them fall, then! What you are thinking of, Catherine Carr, is Miles Wadsworth's father and mother, and sister Pamela."

Catherine went rosy red, and ran, with her grandmother calling vainly after her, through the house to the garden. It was in her mind to cross to the fields from the garden, and then to run through them to a point farther up the road, that being considered a shorter way.

Catherine hurried through the old garden, overrun with box in sinuous green windings, under the arches of ancient rose-trees. Black Sylvy's eyes rolled white with childlike wonder and terror from the shadowy kitchen window. Catherine ran

down the main garden path, between the humping rows of box. She climbed the wall at the rear, and had just set foot on the sun-baked grass of the field when she gave a choking cry and started back. Captain Miles Wadsworth was coming towards her, running weakly, as if he were about to fall, flinging out with uncertain knees like a drunken man. His face was darkly flushed, though it had grown so thin that one who did not know it as well as her own might not have recognized it, and he kept one hand pressed hard against his side.

For a second Catherine felt as if she were in a dream, and as if it were her eyes awaver with sleep which gave this dream man his wavering gait; then she sprang forward. "Miles! Miles!" she cried out, and caught him by the arm; and he leaned against her shoulder, and would have fallen except for her. "How came you here? What is the matter? Oh, Miles!" she cried, trembling and supporting him, and forgetting that there had ever been enmity between them.

"The British! Alarm the town!" gasped out Captain Miles Wadsworth.

"Miles, have you escaped from the British ships?"

"Yes. Sweetheart, hurry; I can go no farther. I swam ashore, and the sun heat —and—I have had a wound in my side. Go, go!"

"Miles, if they find you, you will be shot."

"Never mind me, Catherine. Run to the town!"

"And a boat-load is coming to the anchorage at the tavern," cried Catherine in a frenzy. "They will find you here; they will stop and search the house; 'tis you they are after, Miles."

"No, I—overheard—they will—bombard Stonington in an hour. Go, Catherine."

"They will stop and search, and if they find you, they will kill you, Miles."

"As well one time as another, Catherine," replied Captain Miles Wadsworth, faintly, with a little bitterness of sadness. "I have no sweetheart and no ship, and my old father and mother have another son and will not miss me. I must die for my country, which alone has any need of me, and as well now. Run to Stonington,

"HE KEPT ONE HAND PRESSED HARD AGAINST HIS SIDE"

Catherine, for ten minutes on the earthworks may mean victory and the salvation of the town. Leave me where I am, and go."

But Catherine Carr, with her mouth set hard, was already urging the young man towards the house, though he continued to beg her not, almost piteously. "Catherine, for your life leave me and go," he begged, stammering and stumbling, for the pain and dizziness in his head were great, and his feet met the ground with strange shocks. Captain Miles Wadsworth was nearly spent with exhaustion from the heat and the stress and anxiety of his escape, being also weakened in health by anxiety of mind and a bullet wound received some time since in his side. His good ship *The Commonwealth* had been captured by the British on the high seas before the war had begun, and he himself impressed into service in the British navy. That morning, having discovered that messengers were to be sent to warn Stonington and give her an hour to remove the inhabitants, he had jumped overboard and swum ashore; but on reaching the land he

had sunk down exhausted, and lain there he knew not how long.

Catherine half dragged, half bore him into the house, to the bedroom out of the cool north parlor, and forced him gently upon the bed, on which he sank, gasping faintly, for his strength was almost spent.

Madam Carr stood in the entry as they passed, and black Sylvy's eyes rolled white over her shoulder. "Who — who — ?" demanded Madam Carr, and her face was as pale as her darned laces. She did not know Miles Wadsworth with his emaciated figure and his thin flushed face.

Catherine answered not a word till she had laid Miles on the bed and come back panting. "Fetch cold water from the well, and a towel, quick," she ordered Sylvy, imperatively, then ran to the cupboard in the south room for a glass of cordial; but Madam Carr caught her by the arm. "Who is it, Catherine Carr?" she demanded.

"Miles—it is Miles; let me go."

"How comes he here?"

"He has escaped from the British. Let me go, grandmother."

"They will shoot him if they find him here."

"They shall not find him."

"I saw the gleam of their bayonets down the road before I came in. They are almost here. They will shoot him if they find him, Catherine Carr."

Catherine gazed at her grandmother with a face of pale desperation; then the color came back, her eyes flashed with sudden resolution and fun, and she gave one leap towards the north porch, where lay the red damask petticoat which she had been mending.

"Catherine, Catherine Carr, what are you going to do?"

Catherine made a swift notch with her scissors, then, with a fierce twitch of her strong young arm, rent the petticoat from belt to hem.

"Catherine, what are you doing? Are you gone mad?"

Catherine made no reply; she rushed to the fireplace, caught up the poker, and thrust it through the band of the damask petticoat, then scuttled up the winding spiral of the front stair, and hung out the

red flag which she had improvised from the second-story window over the front door.

Madam Carr, all in a tremulous whir of silken skirts, stood at the foot of the stair; she thought that her granddaughter had lost her wits over the peril of her lover. "Catherine," she called, faintly, and as she called caught a scarlet gleam through the side-lights of the front door, heard the tramp of heavy feet, and the jingle of swords, then a great clatter of the knocker. Then she heard the voice of Catherine, who was waving the red flag from the window overhead—

"What do you want, gentlemen?"

A voice of inquiry sounded from without, and it was imperious, though somewhat tempered by admiration for Catherine's fair face, and respect for her gentle, fine-bred manners.

Then Madam Carr heard her granddaughter's voice again, gentle as ever, yet with a tone in it which she had never heard, and which seemed to show in a flash the girl to her as a stranger: "It is the flag of the small-pox, gentlemen. You

THE IMPROVISED FLAG

can enter if you please, but you will do so at your peril."

There was a commotion among the redcoats; then the man's voice sounded again, with a quaver of consternation in it, "Who is ill, madam?"

And Catherine Carr answered, unfaltering over the first lie of her life, "My brother, gentlemen."

"A sailor has escaped from our ship this morning. Has one come here seeking shelter?"

"No, sir."

There was a confused murmur of voices; then the leading one was heard again: "I am despatched by the British commodore to give notice to the inhabitants of Stonington that the bombardment by his Majesty's ships will begin in an hour's time, and to warn them to remove to places of safety."

"Oh, I pray you, gentlemen," cried Catherine Carr — and if she was guilty of a bit of malicious humor in the midst of her terror and danger they did not perceive it—"I pray you, gentlemen, to assist me in removing my poor brother,

who is in the worst stage of the disease, to some place of safety before the bombardment begins."

Then the young officer, who had a face as fair and rosy as the ladies of whom he was a dear lover, answered in great haste: "There is no cause for alarm, madam; you are well out of range of our fire. There is no occasion to remove your brother, and it might do him great harm, since he is in such a state. I bid you good-day, and may the sad affliction which is upon your house spare your roses!"

Then Madam Carr heard the heavy tramp of retreating feet, and saw the vanishing swing of scarlet shoulders, and Catherine came down-stairs, laughing.

Her grandmother, pale with anxiety and bewilderment, yet looked at her with asperity. "Laugh, if you can, at falsehood and disloyalty against your rightful country and ruler," said she, "but you know not if they will not return and shoot your lover in there, and you know not if he be not lying dead now with a sunstroke. You would laugh on the verge of the grave."

Catherine turned pale, and hastened into

the north bedroom, where Captain Miles lay, with black Sylvy wetting his head with cloths wet in cold water, and crooning the while with a half-savage murmur of sympathy and love. Miles did not open his eyes as Catherine bent over him, and Sylvy shook her head warningly. In spite of his peril and anxiety, Miles Wadsworth had fallen into the repose of utter exhaustion.

Madam Carr beckoned Catherine out into the parlor. "What if they suspect, and stop on their way back — what then?" she whispered.

"They will not stop when they are bound on such an errand," Catherine whispered back, but her forehead was contracted a little. Then suddenly her whole face lighted with the flash of her ready wit, and her mouth twitched, for so full of spirit was she that she had presence of mind to love the jest which sometimes rides abreast with danger. Out she ran to the kitchen, got a jar of the currant jelly which she had just made, and the porringer of paste which she had used for fastening the little circles of letter-paper over the jars, and was back in the bedroom. Then, while the black

woman watched her in consternation, though she ceased not her cold-water applications, she made with soft and deft touches Captain Miles Wadsworth's handsome face resemble most hideously that of a small-pox patient.

When Catherine turned, after finishing her work, she saw her grandmother standing in the doorway, watching her with an expression which resembled her own. Full of perturbation and anxiety was Madam Carr's face, and yet there was a lift at her mouth corners which denoted something else. Suddenly she glided swiftly to the cupboard beside the chimney in the parlor, where they kept a small stock of domestic remedies, and displayed, with a shrewd narrowing of her eyes, a small vial to Catherine. "It is assafœtida, and, in case they return, it can be spilled on the floor for the evil smell of the disease," said she, and Catherine nodded, laughing again; but at that moment came a clattering knock on the front door, which caused them both to start and pale.

"They have come back," gasped Catherine, losing for the moment her courage;

but her grandmother stood firm. "Go to the door," said she, "and fetch them in if they have a mind!" Then she went herself into the bedroom, ordered Sylvy away, and took her place at Captain Miles's head.

Catherine ran up the stairs, flung open the window, and brandished her ominous flag. Only one man stood below—a grizzled old king's veteran, with a square jaw, small eyes of stubborn defiance, and a face deeply dinted with the small-pox. In doubt and suspicion as to whether the deserter, or a body of the enemy and arms, might not be concealed in the house, this man, John Busby by name, had volunteered to return and face the pestilence.

"You will enter at your peril, sir," declared Catherine's sweet voice from the window. She had quite recovered herself; her eyes flashed, and her cheeks were as red as her flag.

When the caller declared gruffly his intention to enter, Catherine ran down at once and opened the door, and led the way to the bedroom wherein Captain Miles Wadsworth lay.

"I beg you, sir, to be quiet, and not

disturb my brother, or his life may answer for it," said Catherine, softly; and the soldier made no answer, but trod on tiptoe, and barely stepped over the bedroom threshold. Indeed, he found one look and one breath enough. Madam Carr had spilled all the assafœtida as she proposed, and Captain Wadsworth's face in the darkened room was a hideous sight. Madam Carr had slipped the wet towel over his forehead and eyes, but the lower part of his face was exposed, and it looked, as John Busby reported, for all the world like a Christmas pudding. And as for the disease being small-pox—"Go there and draw one long breath," said John Busby.

John Busby retreated, fairly routed, though he knew it not, by the wit of two women, sturdy soldier though he was, and the gleam of his scarlet coat was soon out of sight on the Stonington road.

After he was gone, Captain Miles Wadsworth lay in such a peace of rest and slumber that seemed almost like that of death, and Madam Carr ordered that he be left to himself. "He will do now," said

"ONLY ONE MAN STOOD BELOW"

she, "but we will leave his face as 'tis lest they come again, and he be shot, and we convicted of perjury."

She went out with her stately glide, but Catherine lingered, gave a swift glance around to make sure that she was not seen, then bent over the sleeping man and kissed him softly. Then she slipped out, all glowing with blushes, and looked at the tall clock on the stair landing. It was about five o'clock in the afternoon. Catherine reckoned, standing there. "In about half an hour they will have reached Stonington and given warning," she reflected; "then they have to return to their ship. That will take near an hour longer, as they have computed. The bombardment will begin about the half-hour after six."

Suddenly the thought came to Catherine Carr, "If—if those messengers could be delayed two hours—one hour—only one half-hour—the people of Stonington might be able to save the town." For she remembered what her lover had said as to the value of even fifteen minutes for the strengthening of defences. Catherine

Carr, a slim young figure, in her gown of faded purples and roses, stood with her fair alert face fronting the face of the clock as if it were the veritable one of time and eternity, in which she could find the eyelight of wisdom.

Then she threw back her head, her white throat swelled, and she gave a short laugh, which was to her gay undaunted temper the expression of resolution.

Catherine hurried out on the porch, caught up the remaining half of her red damask petticoat, and raced down the road.

Catherine hastened towards the tavern, which had been so incontinently deserted, down the stretch of dusty road between the powdered thickets of gold and purple midsummer bloom. The sun rays beat over from the westward like the fierce arrows of retreating hunters, there were broadsides of heat from earth and sky, and every leaf and blade and flower had seemingly its own shot for the weary eye that beheld it, for it was one of the hottest days of the year. But Catherine had no thought of the heat as she sped along,

being fully possessed with fiercest love and loyalty, not for her country — for as to that she was divided — but for her lover. She remembered Miles Wadsworth's anxiety for the safety of Stonington, and how he had risked his own life for that end, and rather than fire against his countrymen.

"Stonington shall be saved, Miles," she cried, exultantly, as she hurried along. She thought of the good folk whom she knew in the town, and how Miles Wadsworth's father and mother and sister dwelt there.

When she reached the tavern she saw the boat from the British frigate rocking on the blue swell, and to her great relief it was empty. Her fear had been lest a sailor or two were left in charge. She did not know that such was the case, and that they had been lured from their allegiance by the abandoned barrels of New England rum in the tavern, and were then therein, forgetful of friend and foe alike.

Catherine got a hatchet from the tavern wood-pile, and ran down the beach

to the boat. She had a strong arm and wrist; she had soon cut a hole in the bottom of the boat, and severed the rope. All the time she was in deadly fear lest some one on the ships which swarmed aloof in the haze of the heat might spy her out with a glass. She had, to guard against that, brought the severed half of her damask petticoat and pinned it over her shoulders, that any watcher might take it for the red coat of England.

When her work was done, and she was hurrying up the road, she cast a glance back, to see the dim ships moving in a line towards a position more directly opposite the town, all except one, which lingered for the return of the boat.

"That boat will never return," thought Catherine Carr, "and they cannot bombard until they are sure that the first shot will not kill their own men."

Then she reflected—suppose she had scuttled the boat, how long would it take for the soldiers to signal the ship, and for another boat to be sent to them? It would take some time, certainly, but could she not delay them longer still? A spirit

of utter daring and mischief seized the girl, and imaginations as extravagant as those of a child possessed her. She was of an exceeding nervous temperament, as finely responsive to all new conditions as a bird which slants its wings to every change of wind. Moreover, the intense heat of the day, instead of depressing her with slumbrous languor, had stung her to freer life. She had risen with higher and higher understanding and capacity to every new emergency of danger, until now she was in a fairly abnormal condition of activity, and barriers were as nothing to the leaping powers of her mind.

"I will delay the British ships longer still," said Catherine Carr.

Just before she reached her own house she saw a thick cloud of dust ahead, then horns tossed through it, followed by bounding red flanks and lashing tails. Then she heard the shrill scream of a fife, and knew that little Johnny Purdy was driving home the cows, playing the while on the fife on which his grandfather had played in the Revolution, and in which his soul delighted.

Catherine bounded forward and caught the boy by the arm. He stared at her in bewilderment, his fife still at his pouting lips. He and his widowed mother, living off the main road, had heard naught of the approach of the British.

Catherine talked fast; the boy's face kindled as he listened. He was a sunburnt lad of twelve, with ready blushes, but steady eyes.

When Catherine released him, bidding him hurry, he went forward with a leap, driving the cows at a furious rate, but his fife was still.

Catherine ran towards the house, and her grandmother met her at the door. "He is still asleep," she said. "Where have you been, Catherine Carr?"

"I have been to the British boat and scuttled it."

"They will shoot you for a traitor, and you are one," said Madam Carr, hotly, but her eyes snapped.

Catherine made no reply, but hurried up to the garret and got the two old muskets which her grandfather Carr had once used against the colonists.

"What are you going to do with the muskets? Is your brain turned?" demanded Madam Carr, when Catherine came down.

"Go to the door and watch, grandmother, and you will see," answered Catherine, running out with a musket over each shoulder, though they were of prodigious weight and length, and she could scarcely walk under them.

The country road was bordered with stone walls. Catherine laid her two muskets one over each wall, a little above the house, with their muzzles pointing up the road at a slight slant. Then back she went for some pokers and tongs and shovels, and even warming-pans with long brass-bound handles, which, seen in an uncertain light of gathering dusk, and also of storm, for that which had threatened all day was rolling high in the northwest, might well deceive the eyes of suspicion in a hostile land. All these she ranged over the stone walls, with the muskets at the ends nearest the town; and then came little Johnny Purdy, dragging painfully the enormous gun used by his

ancestor of Plymouth against the Indians. That, when placed, seemed to project half across the road with its furious old muzzle; and though it could not be fired without such labor and preparation as were out of the question, yet its look was an intimation of a far-reaching death.

Then Johnny Purdy, who was pale under his freckles, for his ancestral blood was surging high in his heart, went, according to instructions, his fife in hand, to a point some distance away in the fields, whence he could fly easily to cover of the woods; and Catherine Carr, with a tin pan and two sticks for a drum, stationed herself aloof on the other side of the road.

When the men from the British ship, with the young officer at their head, came down the road on their way to take boat, having warned the town of Stonington according to instructions, they saw to their dismay a gleaming file as of muskets projecting over either wall just before they reached the Carr house. The thunder-clouds were gathering fast, and there was a sallow twilight over the whole country. They doubted not that they saw at least

twelve good muskets, six on either side of the road, forming a short but certain land of death for the King's men to pass. They halted, and suddenly from the right came the shrill scream of a fife in the tune of "Yankee Doodle"; then the triumphant beat of a drum responded from the left. That meant, to the British, American reenforcements in both quarters, and the impossibility of taking to the fields and skirting the muskets.

The men were brave soldiers as any in his Majesty's service, but a little pause before what seemed a certain march on death did them no discredit. Some time was spent by them in conference as to what course to pursue, some holding it was best to retreat on the town and seize a boat, some holding that since their flag did not protect them here it would not there, and they would either be cut in pieces, or held prisoners to prevent the bombardment.

And all the time the Stonington men were working for their lives at the earthworks, while the ancient, useless muskets and the pokers, tongs, and warming-pans pointed fiercely over the stone walls, above

the Carr house, at the enemy; and the fife played on the right nearer and nearer, now this way, now that; while the drum sounded bravely on the left.

Finally the men from the British ship placed themselves shoulder to shoulder, levelled their guns, and made a rushing charge, as brave in spirit as that of the six hundred, though it was against a powerless enemy, and their bravery seemed to recoil upon themselves with a shock of mortification and ridicule.

After the bloodless passage between the bristling walls, there was a halt and hoarse shout, half of mirth, half of rage.

Catherine had fled like a deer through the garden into the house, and little Johnny Purdy had dropped into a misty hollow, where they might have searched all night for him in vain. There he lay low, shaking with exultant laughter, though the thunder shower burst over him, drenching him to the skin, and pelting him as with bullets of water.

As Catherine entered the house there came a blinding blue flash, and a report like a whole broadside of artillery. Cath-

erine rushed through into the south room, where her grandmother was. She was laughing, but her grandmother's look checked her.

"See what you have done!" cried Madam Carr, panting. "They are coming back here!"

Catherine looked out of the window, and there were the redcoats coming on a run. Their charge had carried them past, but they had turned as soon as they had collected their wits, and made for the Carr house. They hesitated no longer before that flying ensign of a dread pestilence. Either they, having just experienced such a scurvy trick, suspected the subterfuge, or, being so wroth with those who had mocked them, feared no danger, or else were minded to seek one moment's shelter from the fury of the storm, though that would have scarcely been to their credit, being on the King's service; but whatever may have been the reason, they were coming.

Catherine Carr's brave heart and gay daring failed her utterly. "They—will—find him!" she gasped. This contingency had not entered her head, which was, after

all, that of a child's, without enough retrospective distance to give her the best foresight.

Then it was that Madam Carr arose. "Be quiet, Catherine Carr, and do as I bid you, and I will save him," said she, and went straight across to the north parlor, with Catherine at her heels, though her knees shook so that she could scarcely step.

In the north parlor was a carved chest of precious Indian wood. It had been one of Madam Carr's wedding treasures, and held some of her most precious belongings, her bridal gown and veil and satin shoes, and her dead husband's knee-buckles among them.

Madam Carr flung open the chest, and drew therefrom a parcel securely folded in a fine linen cloth, laid well under the others, for it was a contraband thing, and had been kept for years at the risk of disparagement to Madam Carr's loyalty.

She unfolded the parcel while the knocks of the British soldiers resounded through the house, and shook out the British ensign, which had been struck on a British man-of-war in the Revolution, and had fallen into

her husband's hands, to be held sacred by him, and his widow after him.

In the bedroom, dark with the storm, Captain Miles Wadsworth was stirring in faint bewildered wise, awakened by the roll of the thunder and the clatter at the door. Madam Carr, holding the flag behind her, went into the room and up to the bed, Catherine following.

"The British are about to enter this house," said Madam Carr. "They will shoot you for a deserter if they find you here. Shut your eyes and lie still, and hold your breath, for your life."

Miles tried to speak.

"Do as I bid you, for your life," ordered Madame Carr. "Shut your eyes and hold your breath."

Captain Miles Wadsworth, borne down in his weakness by this onslaught of maternal will, closed his eyes. Then Madam Carr flung the British ensign over him as he lay there, and stood at his side, her head bowed as in pale and tearless grief, when the redcoats rushed into the room.

There was a sudden hush as they saw the still shape on the bed under the British flag,

the stony grief of the stately old woman, and Catherine, who was weeping in good earnest, for her nerves had given way.

They all uncovered, and then the young officer gave the word to leave the room; but the old soldier John Busby spoke up in surly defiance of authority. "Sir," said he, "they have just served us one trick; this may be another."

"Silence!" cried the officer, with a side glance towards the weeping Catherine, and maybe an uneasy consciousness of the evil odor in the room—"Silence! The man under my command who respects not the dead covered by the British flag falls himself. March!"

The young officer gave one more admiring and passionate glance at Catherine. If he suspected aught wrong, he hid his suspicions from himself, and as he spoke he heard a signal-gun from his ship, and knew that there was no time to waste upon such play as this. Then he went out of the room, his men following.

The signal-gun from the ship was fired again as the redcoats hurried down the road, with the storm driving hard at their

heels, and the lightning playing upon their scarlet backs like whips of fire.

The bombardment of Stonington was a good three hours late that night, and though continued until midnight, and with intervals for three days, and some property demolished, the town was saved, and finally the British fleet sailed away, leaving the American flag still floating over the ramparts.

To Catherine Carr the safety of the town, though she had striven so hard for it, was as nothing to that of her lover; but his rejoicing was somewhat tempered with mortification when he learned that he had been saved by the flag which was hostile to his country. "A traitor and a coward might have availed himself of such a means of safety," he said once, hotly; but Madam Carr faced him with stern indignation: "English you were born, and your forebears. English you will live and die, and those who come after you," declared she. "Blood is blood, and race is race, and you cannot change it, though you deny your King, and crown all your own unworthy heads. You will speak with an English tongue, and look

askance at the rest of the world with English eyes, as long as you live. The English flag covered those who came before you from death and insult, and will cover those who come after you. It has saved your life now, and you have cause for honor and pride, and not shame." With that Madam Carr went out of the room, her head as high and stiff as if she bore the majesty of England upon it, and left Catherine and her lover alone in the north parlor. That was a year later, when peace was established and Miles's health quite restored, and he and Catherine were to be married the next day. Even then, Miles's sister Pamela, and Catherine's brother Harry, and some of her mates, were out in the fields gathering wild flowers to trim the old Carr house for the wedding.

Catherine Carr, who was strong in natural feminine wiles for the soothing of man, and understood well how to inveigle him sweetly away from a bone of argument rather than allow him to pause to wrangle over it, simply remarked to Miles that breathing New England air for threescore years and ten had not changed grand-

mother Carr's old England heart, and old trees must lean their own way, and went on to tell him gayly of little Johnny Purdy's trepidation over bringing home the wedding-cake from Stonington, whither it had been taken to be iced, on his wheelbarrow, and how he had sighed with relief when he landed it safe at the door, having neither spilled it in the dust nor had it tasted by wasp or bee or boy.

Miles Wadsworth looked at Catherine's beautiful, laughing face, and thought no more then of how his life had been saved, since saved it was for so great happiness; but Catherine, with her head on her lover's shoulder, cast a mindful glance at the old carved chest in the corner which held the British flag.

# The Three Old Sisters and the Old Beau

# The Three Old Sisters and the Old Beau

THE three old sisters, Rachel and Nancy and Camilla, lived in the house in which they had been born. They were very old in years—the youngest was nearly seventy—but they were, after all, the most youthful maidens in the village. Not a child dragging her doll-carriage past their windows, not a young girl strolling by in the twilight on her lover's arm, was as young as they, for the youth in them had actually triumphed over age, and gained, as it were, a species of immortality in this world.

Did not Camilla and Nancy, the two younger, really play at grace-hoops sometimes of an evening? The fantastic old shadows, with stiff rheumatic gestures,

apeing the free motions of youth, and the flying hoops, had been plainly seen on the window-curtains after the candles were lighted. The hoops themselves, wound with faded ribbons, the relics of a graceful sport of their graceful girlhood, hung conspicuously over the mahogany table in their front hall.

In this same front hall, large and square, hung with old greenish landscape paper, with a spiral stair winding slowly upward from its midst, the three old sisters were wont to sit in the cool of summer afternoons. At five o'clock the front door, topped with bull's-eyes of dull green glass, was thrown open, and the three appeared, sitting in state, with their embroidery-work. They still embroidered, bending their spectacled eyes painfully over scallops and sprigs and eyelet-holes. They had never outgrown the occupations of their youth, as they had scarcely outgrown its amusements. It did not seem impossible that Camilla, the youngest, sometimes nursed her ancient doll in her withered bosom.

However, the strongest evidence of the

youth which still survived in their hearts, and answered to their conceptions of themselves and one another, was in their costumes. The three old sisters, Rachel, Nancy, and Camilla, sat in their front hall arrayed in bygone silks and muslins, made after the fashions of their girlhood days, with no alterations.

Scanty ruffled skirts clinging to their wasted limbs the three wore, and low bodices and elbow sleeves, displaying pitilessly their withered necks and arms, from which all the sweet curves of youth had departed.

Their gray and scanty locks were arranged in ringlets, and garnished with shell combs, and sometimes a wreath of faded artificial flowers.

It was inconceivable how one, surveying the others, as they sat there in their gay array, could not have seen in their faces, if not in her looking-glass, the loss of her youth; but if she did, she made no sign. Not one of them seemed to have a suspicion that these old costumes did not become them as fairly as ever, and nobody knew if their illusions ever failed them at the sight of one another's parchment

skins, and the hollows between their poor old bones.

Always on a pleasant summer afternoon, as they sat there in their front hall, the old Beau came stepping across the way from his old house, half hidden behind a little grove of pine-trees. He was as old as the eldest sister, but not at all feeble. He carried his handsome white head proudly above his old-fashioned high stock, and had a military set-back to his shoulders.

The old Beau, while looking, in his morning attire, not so very different from the modern man, clung always to his old costumes of state. When he crossed the road to the sisters of an afternoon he wore always his silk bell hat and blue swallow-tail coat, with bright brass buttons, and swung, with a fine courtly flourish of the past, an ancient ivory-headed cane. No one knew which of the sisters possessed the warmest affection of his faithful old heart. He had stepped across the road to visit them ever since people could remember. He had never had any other sweetheart, and they had never had any other beau.

One and then another of the sisters had

been supposed to devote her virgin heart to him, and been pining over his long courtship. Nancy, the middle sister, was the one popularly considered to have especially favored him. There were vague whispers of more particular attentions paid her in years gone by. Moreover, she had been the beauty of the family. Tall and willowy in figure, with long brown curls drooping over rose-leaf cheeks, with gentle blue eyes, had Nancy been in her youth.

It seemed probable that she had crept the closest to the heart of the old Beau, but no one really knew. He was a close man, and quite a student; he lived in his old library, walled in with musty books, and wrote with his quill pen pages of fine crabbed letters, which no one ever read, nor knew what their subject was. His one outside diversion was his afternoon call upon the three sisters.

Then, seated, in summer-time, in a carved arm-chair in their front hall, and in the winter in their parlor, with a damask napkin over his thin knees, he partook of tea in a blue china cup, and pound-cake in a blue china plate. The sisters' maidser-

vant always passed around a tea-tray in the afternoon—an old and genteel custom which prevailed nowhere else in the village.

Nancy, the middle sister, died first—of old age, the town record said, although that seemed impossible, and the other sisters insisted that it was of a cold upon the lungs. "Consumption is in our mother's family, and Nancy was always delicate. I never expected she would live to be old," Rachel told the minister when he called.

After Nancy's death the old Beau drank tea with the other sisters for another summer, then Rachel died, and there was only Camilla left. He did not make his call every afternoon after that. It was understood that she had doubts about the strict propriety of such solitary visits, and had prohibited them.

Then it was that the old Beau manifested symptoms of uneasiness. At the hour when he had been accustomed to call upon his friends he strolled aimlessly about the roads, switching the way-side weeds with his cane. People thought that he was ageing fast.

About three months after Rachel's death,

one midsummer Sunday, the old Beau and Camilla walked down the road together to meeting, and it was said that they had gone to the minister's that morning and been married.

The Bridegroom wore his old dress costume of bell hat and blue swallow-tail coat, and held up his handsome white head like a prince in his high stock, and the Bride minced gently at his side in an ample bridal array of a long-past fashion and cut. A white bride-bonnet, white-veiled and crowned with white plumes, adorned the old Bride, and she wore a lustrous white satin gown with a low bodice, a white Canton crape shawl, and white satin shoes. That bridal costume had, beyond doubt, been prepared years and years gone by for one of the sisters, in anticipation of youthful love and wedded bliss; but for which? No one ever knew. Some, indeed, fancied that the white satin breadths were overlong for Camilla, and would better have suited Nancy, who had been taller, but who could say with certainty, since Camilla stooped with age, and must have lost somewhat of her youthful stature?

The old Bride passed up the aisle with her old Bridegroom, and a smile of youth that triumphed over age and memory shone on her old face through her white veil, and no one ever knew whether she wore her own or her sister's wedding-gown, or had wedded her own or her sister's old Beau.

# One Good Time

# One Good Time

RICHARD STONE was nearly seventy-five years old when he died, his wife was over sixty, and his daughter Narcissa past middle age. Narcissa Stone had been very pretty, and would have been pretty still had it not been for those lines, as distinctly garrulous of discontent and worry as any words of mouth, which come so easily in the face of a nervous, delicate-skinned woman. They were around Narcissa's blue eyes, her firmly closed lips, her thin nose; a frown like a crying repetition of some old anxiety and indecision was on her forehead; and she had turned her long neck so much to look over her shoulder for new troubles on her track that the lines of fearful expectation had settled there. Narcissa had yet her beautiful thick hair,

which the people in the village had never quite liked because it was red, her cheeks were still pink, and she stooped only a little from her slender height when she walked. Some people said that Narcissa Stone would be quite good-looking now if she had a decent dress and bonnet. Neither she nor her mother had any clothes which were not deemed shabby, even by the humbly attired women in the little mountain village. "Mis' Richard Stone, she 'ain't had a new silk dress since Narcissa was born," they said; "and as for Narcissa, she 'ain't never had anything that looked fit to wear to meeting."

When Richard Stone died, people wondered if his widow and Narcissa would not have something new. Mrs. Nathan Wheat, who was a third cousin to Richard Stone, went, the day before the funeral, a half-mile down the brook road to see Hannah Turbin, the dressmaker. The road was little travelled; she walked through an undergrowth of late autumn flowers, and when she reached the Turbins' house her black thibet gown was gold-powdered and white-flecked to the knees with

pollen and winged seeds of passed flowers.

Hannah Turbin's arm, brown and wrinkled like a monkey's, in its woollen sleeve, described arcs of jerky energy past the window, and never ceased when Mrs. Wheat came up the path and entered the house. Hannah herself scarcely raised her seamy brown face from her work.

"Good-afternoon," said Mrs. Wheat.

Hannah nodded. "Good-afternoon," she responded then, as if words were an afterthought.

Mrs. Wheat shook her black skirts vigorously. "I'm all over dust from them yaller weeds," said she. "Well, I don't care about this old thibet." She pulled a rocking-chair forward and seated herself. "Warm for this time of year," said she.

Hannah drew her thread through her work. "Yes, 'tis," she returned, with a certain pucker of scorn, as if the utter foolishness of allusions to obvious conditions of nature struck her. Hannah Turbin was not a favorite in the village, but she was credited with having much com-

mon-sense, and people held her in somewhat distant respect.

"Guess it's Injun summer," remarked Mrs. Wheat.

Hannah Turbin said nothing at all to that. Mrs. Wheat cast furtive glances around the room as she swayed in her rocking-chair. Everything was very tidy, and there were few indications of its owner's calling. A number of fashion papers were neatly piled on a bureau in the corner, and some nicely folded breadths of silk lay beside them. There was not a scrap or shred of cloth upon the floor; not a thread, even. Hannah was basting a brown silk basque. Mrs. Wheat could see nowhere the slightest evidence of what she had come to ascertain, so was finally driven to inquiry, still, however, by devious windings.

"Seems sad about Richard," she said.

"Yes," returned Hannah, with a sudden contraction of her brown face, which seemed to flash a light over a recollection in Mrs. Wheat's mind. She remembered that there was a time, years ago, when Richard Stone had paid some attention to

"'WARM FOR THIS TIME OF YEAR'"

Hannah Turbin, and people had thought he might marry her instead of Jane Basset. However, it had happened so long ago that she did not really believe that Hannah dwelt upon it, and it faded immediately from her own mind.

"Well," said she, with a sigh, "it is a happy release, after all, he's been such a sufferer so long. It's better for him, and it's better for Jane and Narcissa. He's left 'em comfortable; they've got the farm, and his life's insured, you know. Besides, I suppose Narcissa 'll marry William Crane now. Most likely they'll rent the farm, and Jane will go and live with Narcissa when she's married. I want to know—"

Hannah Turbin sewed.

"I was wondering," continued Mrs. Wheat, "if Jane and Narcissa wasn't going to have some new black dresses for the funeral. They 'ain't got a thing that's fit to wear, I know. I don't suppose they've got much money on hand now except what little Richard saved up for his funeral expenses. I know he had a little for that because he told me so, but

the life-insurance is coming in, and anybody would trust them. There's a nice piece of black cashmere down to the store, a dollar a yard. I didn't know but they'd get dresses off it; but Jane she never tells me anything—anybody 'd think she might, seeing as I was poor Richard's cousin; and as for Narcissa, she's as close as her mother."

Hannah Turbin sewed.

"'Ain't Jane and Narcissa said anything to you about making them any new black dresses to wear to the funeral?" asked Mrs. Wheat, with desperate directness.

"No, they 'ain't," replied Hannah Turbin.

"Well, then, all I've got to say is they'd ought to be ashamed of themselves. There they've got fourteen if not fifteen hundred dollars coming in from poor Richard's insurance money, and they ain't even going to get decent clothes to wear to his funeral out of it. They 'ain't made any plans for new bonnets, I know. It ain't showing proper respect to the poor man. Don't you say so?"

"I suppose folks are their own best judges," said Hannah Turbin, in her conclusive, half-surly fashion, which intimidated most of her neighbors. Mrs. Wheat did not stay much longer. When she went home through the ghostly weeds and grasses of the country road she was almost as indignant with Hannah Turbin as with Jane Stone and Narcissa. "Never saw anybody so close in my life," said she to herself. "Needn't talk if she don't want to. Dun'no' as thar's any harm in my wanting to know if my own third cousin is going to have mourning wore for him."

Mrs. Wheat, when she reached home, got a black shawl which had belonged to her mother out of the chest, where it had lain in camphor, and hung it on the clothesline to air. She also removed a spray of bright velvet flowers from her bonnet, and sewed in its place a black ostrich feather. She found an old crape veil too, and steamed it into stiffness. "I'm going to go to that funeral looking decent, if his own wife and daughter ain't," she told her husband.

"If I wa'n't along, folks would take you

for the widder," said Nathan Wheat, with a chuckle. Nathan Wheat was rather inclined to be facetious with his wife.

However, Mrs. Wheat was not the only person who attended poor Richard Stone's funeral in suitable attire. Hannah Turbin was black from head to foot; the material, it is true, was not of the conventional mourning kind, but the color was. She wore a black silk gown, a black ladies'-cloth mantle, a black velvet bonnet trimmed with black flowers, and a black lace veil.

"Hannah Turbin looked as if she was dressed in second mourning," Mrs. Wheat said to her husband after the funeral. "I should have thought she'd most have worn some color, seeing as some folks might remember she was disappointed about Richard Stone; but, anyway, it was better than to go looking the way Jane and Narcissa did. There was Jane in that old brown dress, and Narcissa in her green, with a blue flower in her bonnet. I think it was dreadful, and poor Richard leaving them all that money through his dying, too."

In truth, all the village was scandalized

"'THERE WAS JANE IN THAT OLD BROWN DRESS, AND NARCISSA IN HER GREEN'"

at the strange attire of the widow and daughter of Richard Stone at his funeral, except William Crane. He could not have told what Mrs. Stone wore, through scarcely admitting her in any guise into his inmost consciousness, and as for Narcissa, he admitted her so fully that he could not see her robes at all in such a dazzlement of vision.

"William Crane never took his eyes off Narcissa Stone all through the funeral; shouldn't be surprised if he married her in a month or six weeks," people said.

William Crane took Jane and Narcissa to the grave in his covered wagon, keeping his old white horse at a decorous jog behind the hearse in the little funeral procession, and people noted that. They wondered if he would go over to the Stones' that evening, and watched, but he did not. He left the mother and daughter to their closer communion of grief that night, but the next the neighbors saw him in his best suit going down the road before dark. "Must have done up his chores early to get started soon as this," they said.

William Crane was about Narcissa's age

but he looked older. His gait was shuffling, his hair scanty and gray, and, moreover, he had that expression of patience which comes only from long abiding, both of body and soul. He went through the south yard to the side door of the house, stepping between the rocks. The yard abounded in mossy slopes of half-sunken rocks, as did the entire farm. Folks often remarked of Richard Stone's place, as well as himself, "Stone by name, and stone by nature." Underneath nearly all his fields, cropping plentifully to the surface, were rock ledges. The grass could be mown only by hand. As for this south yard, it required skilful manœuvring to drive a team through it. When William Crane knocked that evening, Narcissa opened the door. "Oh, it's you!" she said. "How do you do?"

"How do you do, Narcissa?" William responded, and walked in. He could have kissed his old love in the gloom of the little entry, but he did not think of that. He looked at her anxiously with his soft, patient eyes. "How are you gettin' on?" he asked.

"Well as can be expected," replied Narcissa.

"How's your mother?"

"She's well as can be expected."

William followed Narcissa, who led the way, not into the parlor, as he had hoped, but into the kitchen. The kitchen's great interior of smoky gloom was very familiar to him, but to-night it looked strange. For one thing, the arm-chair to which Richard Stone had been bound with his rheumatism for the last fifteen years was vacant, and pushed away into a corner. William looked at it, and it seemed to him that he must see the crooked, stern old figure in it, and hear again the peremptory tap of the stick which he kept always at his side to summon assistance. After his first involuntary glance at the dead man's chair, William saw his widow coming forward out of her bedroom with a great quilt over her arm.

"Good-evenin', William," she said, with faint melancholy, then lapsed into feeble weeping.

"Now, mother, you said you wouldn't; you know it don't do any good, and

you'll be sick," Narcissa cried out, impatiently.

"I know it, Narcissa, but I can't help it, I can't. I'm dreadful upset! Oh, William, I'm dreadful upset! It ain't his death alone—it's—"

"Mother, I'd rather tell him myself," interrupted Narcissa. She took the quilt from her mother, and drew the rocking-chair towards her. "Do sit down and keep calm, mother," said she.

But it was not easy for the older woman, in her bewilderment of grief and change, to keep calm.

"Oh, William, do you know what we're goin' to do?" she wailed, yet seating herself obediently in the rocking-chair. "We're goin' to New York. Narcissa says so. We're goin' to take the insurance money, when we get it, an' we're goin' to New York. I tell her we hadn't ought to, but she won't listen to it! There's the trunk. Look at there, William! She dragged it down from the garret this forenoon. Look at there, William!"

William's startled eyes followed the direction of Mrs. Stone's wavering index

finger, and saw a great ancient trunk lined with blue and white wall-paper, standing open against the opposite wall.

"She dragged it down from the garret this forenoon," continued Mrs. Stone, in the same tone of unfaltering tragedy, while Narcissa, her delicate lips pursed tightly, folded up the bedquilt which her mother had brought. "It bumped so hard on those garret stairs I thought she'd break it, or fall herself, but she wouldn't let me help her. Then she cleaned it, an' made some paste, an' lined it with some of the parlor paper. There ain't any key to it—I never remember none. The trunk was in this house when I come here. Richard had it when he went West before we were married. Narcissa she says she is goin' to tie it up with the clothes-line. William, can't you talk to her? Seems to me I can't go to New York nohow."

William turned then to Narcissa, who was laying the folded bedquilt in the trunk. He looked pale and bewildered, and his voice trembled when he spoke. "This ain't true, is it, Narcissa?" he said.

"Yes, it is," she replied, shortly, still bending over the trunk.

"We ain't goin' for a month," interposed her mother again; "we can't get the insurance money before then, Lawyer Maxham says; but she says she's goin' to have the trunk standin' there, an' put things in when she thinks of it, so she won't forgit nothin'. She says we'd better take one bedquilt with us, in case they don't have 'nough clothes on the bed. We've got to stay to a hotel. Oh, William, can't you say anything to stop her?"

"This ain't true, Narcissa?" William repeated, helplessly.

Narcissa raised herself and faced him. Her cheeks were red, her blue eyes glowing, her hair tossing over her temples in loose waves. She looked as she had when he first courted her. "Yes, it is, William Crane," she cried. "Yes, it is."

William looked at her so strangely and piteously that she softened a little. "I've got my reasons," said she. "Maybe I owe it to you to tell them. I suppose you were expecting something different." She hesi-

tated a minute, looking at her mother, who cried out again :

" Oh, William, say somethin' to stop her! Can't you say somethin' to stop her?"

Then Narcissa motioned to him resolutely. " Come into the parlor, William," said she, and he followed her out across the entry. The parlor was chilly ; the chairs stood as they had done at the funeral, primly against the walls glimmering faintly in the dusk with blue and white paper like the trunk lining. Narcissa stood before William and talked with feverish haste. " I'm going," said she—" I'm going to take that money and go with mother to New York, and you mustn't try to stop me, William. I know what you've been expecting. I know, now father's gone, you think there ain't anything to hinder our getting married ; you think we'll rent this house, and mother and me will settle down in yours for the rest of our lives. I know you ain't counting on that insurance money ; it ain't like you."

" The Lord knows it ain't, Narcissa," William broke out with pathetic pride.

" I know that as well as you do. You

thought we'd put it in the bank for a rainy day, in case mother got feeble, or anything, and that is all you did think. Maybe I'd ought to. I s'pose I had, but I ain't going to. I 'ain't never done anything my whole life that I thought I ought not to do, but now I'm going to. I'm going to if it's wicked. I've made up my mind. I 'ain't never had one good time in my whole life, and now I'm going to, even if I have to suffer for it afterwards.

"I 'ain't never had anything like other women. I've never had any clothes nor gone anywhere. I've just stayed at home here and drudged. I've done a man's work on the farm. I've milked and made butter and cheese; I've waited on father; I've got up early and gone to bed late. I've just drudged, drudged, ever since I can remember. I don't know anything about the world nor life. I don't know anything but my own old tracks, and—I'm going to get out of them for a while, whether or no."

"How long are you calculating to stay?"

"I don't know."

"I've been thinking," said William, "I'd have some new gilt paper on the sitting-

room at my house, and a new stove in the kitchen. I thought—"

"I know what you thought," interrupted Narcissa, still trembling and glowing with nervous fervor. "And you're real good, William. It ain't many men would have waited for me as you've done, when father wouldn't let me get married as long as he lived. I know by good rights I hadn't ought to keep you waiting, but I'm going to, and it ain't because I don't think enough of you—it ain't that; I can't help it. If you give up having me at all, if you think you'd rather marry somebody else, I can't help it; I won't blame you—"

"Maybe you want me to, Narcissa," said William, with a sad dignity. "If you do, if you want to get rid of me, if that's it—"

Narcissa started. "That ain't it," said she. She hesitated, and added, with formal embarrassment — she had the usual reticence of a New England village woman about expressions of affection, and had never even told her lover in actual words that she loved him—"My feelings towards you are the same as they have always been, William."

It was almost dark in the parlor. They could see only each other's faces gleaming as with pale light. "It would be a blow to me if I thought they wa'n't, Narcissa," William returned, simply.

"They are."

William put his arm around her waist, and they stood close together for a moment. He stroked back her tumbled red hair with clumsy tenderness. "You have had a hard time, Narcissa," he whispered, brokenly. "If you want to go, I ain't going to say anything against it. I ain't going to deny I'm kind of disappointed. I've been living alone so long, and I feel kind of sore sometimes with waitin', but—"

"I shouldn't make you any kind of a wife if I married you now, without waiting," Narcissa said, in a voice at once stern and tender. She stood apart from him, and put up her hand with a sort of involuntary maiden primness to smooth her hair where his had stroked it awry. "If," she went on, "I had to settle down in your house, as I have done in father's, and see the years stretching ahead like a long road without any turn, and nothing but the

same old dog-trot of washing and ironing and scrubbing and cooking and sewing and washing dishes till I drop into my grave, I should hate you, William Crane."

"I could fetch an' carry all the water for the washin', Narcissa, and I could wash the dishes," said William, with humble beseeching.

"It ain't that. I know you'd do all you could. It's— Oh, William! I've got to have a break; I've got to have one good time. I—like you, and—I liked father; but love ain't enough sometimes when it ties anybody. Everybody has got their own feet and their own wanting to use 'em, and sometimes when love comes in the way of that, it ain't anything but a dead wall. Once we had a black heifer that would jump all the walls; we had to sell her. She always made me think of myself. I tell you, William, I've got to jump my wall, and I've got to have one good time."

William Crane nodded his gray head in patient acquiescence. His forehead was knitted helplessly; he could not in the least understand what his sweetheart meant; in

her present mood she was in altogether a foreign language for him, but still the unintelligible sound of her was sweet as a song to his ears. This poor village lover had at least gained the crown of absolute faith through his weary years of waiting; the woman he loved was still a star, and her rays not yet resolved into human reachings and graspings.

"How long do you calculate to be gone, Narcissa?" he asked again.

"I don't know," she replied. "Fifteen hundred dollars is a good deal of money. I s'pose it'll take us quite a while to spend it, even if we ain't very saving."

"You ain't goin' to spend it all, Narcissa!" William gave a little dismayed gasp in spite of himself.

"Land, no! we couldn't, unless we stayed three years, an' I ain't calculating to be gone as long as that. I'm going to bring home what we don't want, and put it in the bank; but—I shouldn't be surprised if it took 'most a year to spend what I've laid out to."

"'Most a year!"

"Yes; I've got to buy us both new

clothes for one thing. We 'ain't neither of us got anything fit to wear, and 'ain't had for years. We didn't go to the funeral lookin' decent, and I know folks talked. Mother felt bad about it, but I couldn't help it. I wa'n't goin' to lay out money foolish and get things here when I was going to New York and could have others the way they ought to be. I'm going to buy us some jewelry too; I 'ain't never had a good breastpin even; and as for mother, father never even bought her a ring when they were married. I ain't saying anything against him; it wa'n't the fashion so much in those days."

"I was calculatin'—" William stammered, blushing. "I always meant to, Narcissa."

"Yes, I know you have; but you mustn't lay out too much on it, and I don't care anything about a stone ring—just a plain gold one. There's another thing I'm going to have, too, an' that's a gold watch. I've wanted one all my life."

"Mebbe—" began William, painfully.

"No!" cried Narcissa, peremptorily. "I don't want you to buy me one. I 'ain't

ever thought of it. I'm going to buy it myself. I'm going to buy mother a real cashmere shawl, too, like the one that New York lady had that came to visit Lawyer Maxham's wife. I've got a list of things written down on paper. I guess I'll have to buy another trunk in New York to put them in."

"Well," said William, with a great sigh, "I guess I'd better be goin'. I hope you'll have as good a time as you're countin' on, Narcissa."

"It's the first good time I ever did count on, and I'd ought to," said Narcissa. "I'm going to take mother to the theatre, too. I don't know but it's wicked, but I'm going to." Narcissa fluttered out of the parlor and William shuffled after her. He would not go into the kitchen again.

"Well, good-night," said Narcissa, and William also said good-night, with another heavy sigh. "Look out for them rocks going out of the yard, an' don't tumble over 'em," she called after him.

"I'm used to 'em," he answered back, sadly, from the darkness.

Narcissa shut and bolted the door. "He don't like it; he feels real bad about it; but I can't help it—I'm going."

Through the next few weeks Narcissa Stone's face looked strange to those who had known her from childhood. While the features were the same, her soul informed them with a new purpose, which overlighted all the old ones of her life, and even the simple village folks saw the effect, though with no understanding. Soon the news that Narcissa and her mother were going to New York was abroad. On the morning they started, in the three-seated open wagon which served as stage to connect the little village with the railroad ten miles away, all the windows were set with furtively peering faces.

"There they go," the women told one another. "Narcissa an' her mother an' the trunk. Wonder if Narcissa's got that money put away safe? They're wearin' the same old clothes. S'pose we sha'n't know 'em when they get back. Heard they was goin' to stay a year. Guess old Mr. Stone would rise up in his grave if he knew it. Lizzy saw William Crane a-help-

in' Narcissa h'ist the trunk out ready for the stage. I wouldn't stan' it if I was him. Ten chances to one Narcissa 'll pick up somebody down to New York, with all that money. She's good-lookin', and she looks better since her father died."

Narcissa, riding out of her native village to those unknown fields in which her imagination had laid the scene of the one good time of her life, regarded nothing around her. She sat straight, her slender body resisting stiffly the jolt of the stage. She said not a word, but looked ahead with shining eyes. Her mother wept, a fold of her old shawl before her face. Now and then she lamented aloud, but softly, lest the driver hear. "Goin' away from the place where I was born an' married, an' have lived ever since I knew anything, to stay a year. I can't stan' it, I can't."

"Hush, mother! You'll have a real good time."

"No, I sha'n't, I sha'n't. Goin'—to stay a whole—year. I—can't, nohow."

"S'pose we sha'n't see you back in these parts for some time," the stage-driver said, when he helped them out at the railroad

station. He was an old man, and had known Narcissa since her childhood.

"Most likely not," she replied. Her mother's face was quite stiff with repressed emotion when the stage-driver lifted her out. She did not want him to report in the village that she was crying when she started for New York. She had some pride in spite of her distress.

"Well, I'll be on the lookout for ye a year from to-day," said the stage-driver, with a jocular twist of his face. There were no passengers for his village on the in-coming train, so he had to drive home alone through the melancholy autumn woods. The sky hung low with pale, freezing clouds; over everything was that strange hush which prevails before snow. The stage-driver, holding the reins loosely over his tramping team, settled forward with elbows on his knees, and old brows bent with aimless brooding. Over and over again his brain worked the thought, like a peaceful cud of contemplation. "They're goin' to be gone a year. Narcissa Stone an' her mother are goin' to be gone a year, afore I'll drive 'em home."

So little imagination had the routine of his life fostered that he speculated not, even upon the possible weather of that far-off day, or the chances of his living to see it. It was simply, "They're goin' to be gone a year afore I'll drive 'em home."

So fixed was his mind upon that one outcome of the situation that when Narcissa and her mother reappeared in less than one week—in six days—he could not for a moment bring his mind intelligently to bear upon it. The old stage-driver may have grown something like his own horses through his long sojourn in their company, and his intelligence, like theirs, been given to only the halts and gaits of its first breaking.

For a second he had a bewildered feeling that time had flown fast, that a week was a year. Everybody in the village had said the travellers would not return for a year. He hoisted the ancient paper-lined trunk into his stage, then a fine new one, nailed and clamped with shining brass, then a number of packages, all the time with puzzled eyes askant upon Narcissa and her mother. He would scarcely have known

them, as far as their dress was concerned. Mrs. Stone wore a fine black satin gown; her perturbed old face looked out of luxurious environments of fur and lace and rich black plumage. As for Narcissa, she was almost regal. The old stage-driver backed and ducked awkwardly, as if she were a stranger, when she approached. Her fine skirts flared imposingly, and rustled with unseen silk; her slender shoulders were made shapely by the graceful spread of rich fur, her red hair shone under a hat fit for a princess, and there was about her a faint perfume of violets which made the stage-driver gaze confusedly at the snowy ground under the trees when they had started on the homeward road. "Seems as if I smelt posies, but I know there ain't none hereabouts this time of year," he remarked, finally, in a tone of mild ingratiation, as if more to himself than to his passengers.

"It's some perfumery Narcissa's got on her pocket-handkerchief that she bought in New York," said Mrs. Stone, with a sort of sad pride. She looked worn and bewildered, ready to weep at the sight of familiar things, and yet distinctly superior to all

such weakness. As for Narcissa, she looked like a child thrilled with scared triumph at getting its own way, who rejoices even in the midst of correction at its own assertion of freedom.

"That so?" said the stage-driver, admiringly. Then he added, doubtfully, bringing one white-browed eye to bear over his shoulder, "Didn't stay quite so long as you calculated on?"

"No, we didn't," replied Narcissa, calmly. She nudged her mother with a stealthy, firm elbow, and her mother understood well that she was to maintain silence.

"I ain't going to tell a living soul about it but William Crane; I owe it to him," Narcissa had said to her mother before they started on their homeward journey. "The other folks sha'n't know. They can guess and surmise all they want to, but they sha'n't know. I sha'n't tell; and William, he's as close-mouthed as a rock; and as for you, mother, you always did know enough to hold your tongue when you made up your mind to it."

Mrs. Stone had compressed her mouth until it looked like her daughter's. She

nodded. "Yes," said she; "I know some things that I 'ain't never told you, Narcissa."

The stage passed William Crane's house. He was shuffling around to the side-door from the barn, with a milk-pail in each hand, when they reached it.

"Stop a minute," Narcissa said to the driver. She beckoned to William, who stared, standing stock-still, holding his pails. Narcisssa beckoned again imperatively. Then William set the pails down on the snowy ground and came to the fence. He looked over it, quite pale, and gaping.

"We've got home," said Narcissa.

William nodded; he could not speak.

"Come over by-and-by," said Narcissa.

William nodded.

"I'm ready to go now," Narcissa said to the stage-driver. "That's all."

That evening, when William Crane reached his sweetheart's house, a bright light shone on the road from the parlor windows. Narcissa opened the door. He stared at her open-mouthed. She wore a gown the like of which he had never

seen before—soft lengths of blue silk and lace trailed about her, blue ribbons fluttered.

"How do you do?" said she.

William nodded solemnly.

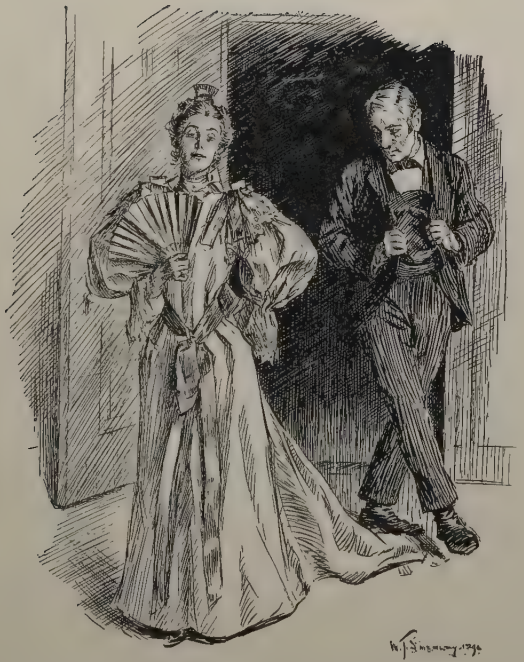
"Come in."

William followed her into the parlor, with a wary eye upon his feet, lest they trample her trailing draperies. Narcissa settled gracefully into the rocking-chair; William sat opposite and looked at her. Narcissa was a little pale, still her face wore that look of insistent triumph.

"Home quicker 'n you expected," William said, at length.

"Yes," said Narcissa. There was a wonderful twist on her red hair, and she wore a high shell comb. William's dazzled eyes noted something sparkling in the laces at her throat; she moved her hand, and something on that flashed like a point of white flame. William remembered vaguely how, often in the summer-time when he had opened his house-door in the sunny morning, the dewdrops on the grass had flashed in his eyes. He had never seen diamonds.

"What started you home so much sooner



"WILLIAM FOLLOWED HER INTO THE PARLOR"

than you expected?" he asked, after a little.

"I spent—all the money—"

"All—that money?"

"Yes."

"Fifteen hundred dollars in less 'n a week?"

"I spent more'n that."

"More'n that?" William could scarcely bring out the words. He was very white.

"Yes," said Narcissa. She was paler than when he had entered, but she spoke quite decidedly. "I'm going to tell you all about it, William. I ain't going to make a long story of it. If after you've heard it you think you'd rather not marry me, I sha'n't blame you. I sha'n't have anything to say against it. I'm going to tell you just what I've been doing; then you can make up your mind.

"To-day's Tuesday, and we went away last Thursday. We've been gone just six days. Mother an' me got to New York Thursday night, an' when we got out of the cars the men come round hollering this hotel an' that hotel. I picked out a man that looked as if he didn't drink and would

drive straight, an' he took us to an elegant carriage, an' mother an' me got in. Then we waited till he got the trunk an' put it up on the seat with him where he drove. Mother she hollered to him not to let it fall off.

"We went to a beautiful hotel. There was a parlor with a red velvet carpet and red stuffed furniture, and a green sitting-room, and a blue one. The ceilin' had pictures on it. There was a handsome young gentleman down-stairs at a counter in the room where we went first, and mother asked him, before I could stop her, if the folks in the hotel was all hónest. She'd been worrying all the way for fear somebody 'd steal the money.

"The gentleman said—he was real polite—if we had any money or valuables, we had better leave them with him, and he would put them in the safe. So we did. Then a young man with brass buttons on his coat took us to the elevator and showed us our rooms. We had a parlor with a velvet carpet an' stuffed furniture and a gilt clock on the mantel-shelf, two bedrooms, and a bath-room. There ain't

anything in town equal to it. Lawyer Maxham ain't got anything to come up to it. The young man offered to untie the rope on the trunk, so I let him. He seemed real kind about it.

"Soon 's the young man went I says to mother, 'We ain't going down to get any tea to-night.'

"'Why not?' says she.

"'I ain't going down a step in this old dress,' says I, 'an' you ain't going in yours.'

"Mother didn't like it very well. She said she was faint to her stomach, and wanted some tea, but I made her eat some gingerbread we'd brought from home, an' get along. The young man with the brass buttons come again after a while an' asked if there was anything we wanted, but I thanked him an' told him there wasn't.

"I would have asked him to bring up mother some tea and a hot biscuit, but I didn't know but what it would put 'em out; it was after seven o'clock then. So we got along till morning.

"The next morning mother an' me went

out real early, an' went into a bakery an' bought some cookies. We ate 'em as we went down the street, just to stay our stomachs; then we went to buying. I'd taken some of the money in my purse, an' I got mother an' me, first of all, two handsome black silk dresses, and we put 'em on as soon as we got back to the hotel, and went down to breakfast.

"You never see anythin' like the dining-room, and the kinds of things to eat. We couldn't begin to eat 'em all. There were men standin' behind our chairs to wait on us all the time.

"Right after breakfast mother an' me put our rooms to rights; then we went out again and bought things at the stores. Everybody was buying Christmas presents, an' the stores were all trimmed with evergreen — you never see anything like it. Mother an' me never had any Christmas presents, an' I told her we'd begin, an' buy 'em for each other. When the money I'd taken with us was gone, I sent things to the hotel for the gentleman at the counter to pay, the way he'd told me to. That day we bought our breastpins and

this ring, an' mother's and my gold watch, an' — I got one for you too, William. Don't you say anything—it's your Christmas present. That afternoon we went to Central Park, an' that evenin' we went to the theatre. The next day we went to the stores again, an' I bought mother a black satin dress, and me a green one. I got this I've got on, too. It's what they call a tea-gown. I always wore it to tea in the hotel after I got it. I got a hat, too, an' mother a bonnet; an' I got a fur cape, and mother a cloak with fur on the neck an' all around it. That evening mother an' me went to the opera; we sat in something they call a box. I wore my new green silk and breastpin, an' mother wore her black satin. We both of us took our bonnets off. The music was splendid; but I wouldn't have young folks go to it much.

"The next day was Sunday. Mother an' me went to meeting in a splendid church, and wore our new black silks. They gave us seats way up in front, an' there was a real good sermon, though mother thought it wa'n't very practical,

an' folks got up an' sat down more'n we do. Mother an' me set still, for fear we'd get up an' down in the wrong place. That evening we went to a sacred concert. Everywhere we went we rode in a carriage. They invited us to at the hotel. an' I s'posed it was free, but it wa'n't, I found out afterwards.

"The next day was Monday—that's yesterday. Mother an' me went out to the stores again. I bought a silk bed-quilt, an' some handsome vases, an' some green an' gilt teacups setting in a tray to match. I've got 'em home without breaking. We got some silk stockings, too, an' some shoes, an' some gold-bowed spectacles for mother, an' two more silk dresses, an' mother a real cashmere shawl. Then we went to see some wax-works, and the pictures and curiosities in the Art Museum; then in the afternoon we went to ride again, and we were goin' to the theatre in the evening; but the gentleman at the counter called out to me when I was going past an' said he wanted to speak to me a minute.

"Then I found out we'd spent all that fifteen hundred dollars, an' more too. We

owed 'em 'most ten dollars at the hotel; an' that wa'n't the worst of it—we didn't have enough money to take us home.

"Mother she broke right down an' cried, an' said it was all we had in the world besides the farm, an' it was poor father's insurance money, an' we couldn't get home, an' we'd have to go to prison.

"Folks come crowding round, an' I couldn't stop her. I don't know what I did do myself; I felt kind of dizzy, an' things looked dark. A lady come an' held a smelling-bottle to my nose, an' the gentleman at the counter sent a man with brass buttons for some wine.

"After I felt better an' could talk steady they questioned me up pretty sharp, an' I told 'em the whole story—about father an' his rheumatism, an' everything, just how I was situated, an' I must say they treated us like Christian folks, though, after all, I don't know as we were much beholden to 'em. We never begun to eat all there was on the list, an' we were real careful of the furniture; we didn't really get our money's worth after all was said. But they said the rest of our bill to them was no mat-

ter, an' they gave us our tickets to come home."

There was a pause. William looked at Narcissa in her blue gown as if she were a riddle whose answer was lost in his memory. His honest eyes were fairly pitiful from excess of questioning.

"Well," said Narcissa, "I've come back, an' I've spent all that money. I've been wasteful an' extravagant an'— There was a gentleman beautifully dressed who sat at our table, an' he talked real pleasant about the weather, an'—I got to thinking about him a little. Of course I didn't like him as well as you, William, for what comes first comes last with all our folks, but somehow he seemed to be kind of a part of the good time. I sha'n't never see him again, an' all there was betwixt us was his saying twice it was a pleasant day, an' once it was cold, an' me saying yes; but I'm going to tell you the whole. I've been an' wasted fifteen hundred dollars; I've let my thoughts wander from you; an' that ain't all. I've had a good time, an' I can't say I 'ain't. I've had one good time, an'—I ain't sorry. You can—do just what

"'I WOULDN'T GO OUT AGAIN IF THE BARS WERE DOWN'"

you think best, William, an'—I won't blame you."

William Crane went over to the window. When he turned round and looked at Narcissa his eyes were full of tears and his wide mouth was trembling. "Do you think you can be contented to—stay on my side of the wall now, Narcissa?" he said, with a sweet and pathetic dignity.

Narcissa in her blue robes went over to him, and put, for the first time of her own accord, an arm around his faithful neck. "I wouldn't go out again if the bars were down," said she.

THE END

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